THE MAKING OF A
RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

*An Essay in the History and Historiography
of the 'Abbāsid Revolution*

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بسم الله الرحيم

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Foreword

It is evident that the advent of Islam was one of the major catalysts in human history. It not only revolutionized the Arabian peninsula, but also radically altered the geo-political map of the greater part of the then known world. Not only that, the new religion gave a new purpose and direction to the lives of its followers with the result that virtually all aspects of life in *Dār al-Islam* underwent significant changes.

Perhaps the most striking change brought about by Islam took place in the mental attitude and outlook of people. In pre-Islamic times, the Arabs had considered their ancient customs, which they assumed to embody the ways of their forefathers, to be of paramount importance. This was implicit, among other things, in the major objection of the contemporaries of the Prophet (peace be on him) to his message. They primarily objected to it on ground of its deviation from and opposition to the ways of the forefathers. This, incidentally, is the same reason which was also put forth by the opponents of the Prophets in earlier times. (See Qur'ān 2:70 and 170; 7:70; 11:62; 34:43; 43:24, and often). Islam demolished that authority — the authority of ancestral custom. "Will they follow their forefathers", enquired the Qur'ān, "even if they knew nothing and were not rightly-directed" (Qur'ān 2:170; 5:104). The void thus created was filled by the authority of Revelation. In order to know what is right from what is wrong one was now required to look primarily to the Qur'ān (and to the words and deeds of the Prophet — peace be on him — which authoritatively explained and elaborated the Qur'ān). This position of the Qur'ān in the estimation of Muslims is well reflected, from the earliest times of Islam, in theology and law, not to mention the sermons of preachers who sought to urge Muslims to maintain high standards of religious faith and pious behaviour.

In the present monograph Dr M. Qasim Zaman has set out to explore the impact of the Qur'ān on early Islamic history as well as its significance and function in early Islamic historiography, especially the history and historiography of the 'Abbāsid revolution. Dr Zaman has ably shown that from the very beginning not only scholars but also the major actors in politics — that is, those saddled in power as well as those in opposition to them — conceived their historical situations and articulated their political standpoints primarily in religious terms.

The author attempts to study the instances of the invocation of and allusion to Qur'ānic verses by the major personalities and representatives of major political interests and movements of the first two centuries of Islam, especially by the 'Abbāsid revolutionaries. He carefully considers the instances of reference to the Qur'ānic verses — whether expressly or by allusion — and shows how those verses represented the responses of the persons concerned to the historical contexts in which they referred to them, how the verses in question were variously interpreted at given points of history, and how the meaning and significance of several historical episodes were brought out through them.

The invocation of the Qur'ānic verses by the 'Abbāsid revolutionaries is also of considerable historiographical interest. One of the main questions in this connection is the authenticity of the Qur'ānic invocations mentioned in the major historical works. For it cannot be altogether ruled out that occasionally the historians might have interjected Qur'ānic verses in their historical narratives, attributing them to different political personalities, or that they might have accepted the reports embodying reference to Qur'ānic verses without subjecting them to exacting criticism. The author is well conscious of such possibilities. Nevertheless, he does not adopt a position of extreme, sterile scepticism. Although he does not pronounce a definitive judgement about the extent to which the reports in the primary historical sources on the question are genuine, he seems to lean to the view that the references to the Qur'ān

in the historical narratives of the 'Abbāsid revolution are, on the whole, fairly plausible:

> Such may, in fact, be taken to be the more likely given the quite well-attested concern of those involved in the ['Abbāsid] movement to dispel doubts about their religious convictions and assert their rectitude. It is hardly unreasonable to assume that the agents of the movement in Khurāsān, who had to win and keep the moral support of their audiences before they could hope to accomplish anything on the battlefield, would have invoked the Qur'ān to silence their critics, to win in disputation with their opponents, and to impress upon their audiences their moral earnestness. This is precisely what many of the references to the Qur'ān...seem designed to accomplish (p. 30).

The present work, in addition to providing significant insights into the major issues pertaining to the history and historiography of the 'Abbāsid movement, to which the work is addressed, also provides some very useful insights into the general outlook of the Muslims of the first two centuries of Islam. One of these is that the outlook of the Muslims was conspicuously integral (an expression I venture to use despite the current French usage of the term *"integralisme"* with a connotation that is hardly complimentary); an outlook that was deeply influenced by their religious world-view and norms. Hence we find that the same criteria to which they had recourse in judging questions of ritual were also used to judge questions pertaining to such matters as political policy and behavior, or the legitimacy of incumbent regimes, or the religious authenticity of the movements of opposition. What would normally be considered purely political issues were conceived by Muslims in religious terms. "Various kinds of grievances", says the author, "might be justified in religious terms, that is, as *religious* grievances, as resulting

from what might be *perceived* as the rulers' indifference, insincerity, or hostility towards religion" (p.21). Mentioning various grievances of the different groups that opposed the Umayyads, he says:

> Religion was the idiom in whose terms resentment over mundane grievances tended typically to be expressed. What particular groups may have meant by their religious slogans was probably quite different things, though..a call for justice in some sense was invariably involved. Now the Ummayds, inasmuch as they were somehow recognized to be the *cause* of this injustice, could be viewed as not simply unjust, but also as irreligious... All the ills of the society could, therefore, be simply explained in terms of this impiety, of this insincerity of the Umayyads towards Islam, and revolt against them could be justified on moral grounds (pp. 21-22).

This indeed is a valuable insight into the nature of the Muslim collectivity for the period in question; in fact, in a rough and ready fashion, this is applicable to the entire period of Islamic history. We are not suggesting that Muslims, or their outlook, remained static. Certainly, it did not remain so. Nevertheless, Muslims never ceased to look to the Qur'ān as the criterion for judging veritably all kinds of problems which they faced at different times. What the author says about the period of 'Abbāsid revolution is no less applicable to the Muslim *ummah* of the twentieth century, viz. that "all parties to the conflict" were agreed on one thing — they recognized the same authority as supreme, "the authority of the very word of God" (p. 60).

To ignore this characteristic of the Muslim mind would certainly prevent us from fully grasping the Muslim society at the time of the 'Abbāsid revolution. Likewise, to ignore that this characteristic still broadly applies to the Muslims of our own time would be a perilous

mistake for it would prevent us from making a sense of the dynamics of the contemporary Muslim society.

We feel privileged to publish this maiden work of Dr M. Qasim Zaman, a very young, but extremely promising historian of Islam who has been assiduously striving for several years to unravel the complexities of the relationship between religion and politics in early Islamic history. We hope and pray that he may have a long and bright academic career and that he may be able to revive and enrich the glorious tradition of Islamic historical scholarship which, for quite a while, has been in serious decline.

Islamabad   Zafar Ishaq Ansari
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Preface

This essay owes much to the kindness of several people. Professor Zafar Ishaq Ansari first encouraged me to undertake this study and, with amazing patience, waited several years for its completion while I was engaged in other things. I have learnt a great deal from the clarity and perceptiveness of his suggestions regarding my various academic pursuits, and his solicitude for my general academic well-being is deeply appreciated. Dr. S. M. Zaman's incisive critique of an earlier draft of this essay gave me the opportunity to revise some of what I have said here, and for this I am grateful. My family has had to bear with me at a very difficult time of my life; I wish to thank them for the great affection with which they have done so. The wide-ranging criticism of my wife, Shaista, has helped improve my work in sundry ways, and her companionship has sustained me all along. Finally, I wish to note that although none of this essay was written while I was at the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal (1990-1994), I should not have been able to write it, at least in its present form, without the intellectually stimulating environment I was privileged to enjoy at that premier institution of learning.

ONE

Introduction

I

This study is concerned with the use, function and meaning of sacred texts in religious discourse. "Discourse" is a difficult term to define;[1] and the addition to it of the adjective "religious" does not make the task any easier. For purposes of this study, "religious discourse" will be understood simply as the more or less sustained articulation of a set of ideas through the use of motifs and texts which have an unambiguously religious meaning and significance for their intended audience. The "sacred texts" in question are the verses of the Qur'ān, which, in Muslim belief, is the revealed word of God. It is not the purpose of this study to evaluate how significant a position the Qur'ān occupies in the Islamic religious and intellectual traditions or what role it plays in the life of Muslims. The aims of the present inquiry are much more modest. We are primarily concerned here with the use of Qur'ānic texts in the religious discourse of one major episode of early Islam, the so-called "'Abbāsid revolution".[2] As recounted by historians of the first centuries of Islam, the history of the 'Abbāsid revolution is studded with invocations of scriptural passages or easily recognizable allusions to them. It is with the major occasions on which, during the 'Abbāsid revolution, the use of Qur'ānic texts is reported, and with some of the

narratives in which such texts occur, that we shall be concerned in this essay. This essay does not seek to offer a general account of the ʿAbbāsid revolution, nor even a comprehensive treatment of the religious discourse of that revolution. It is an exploration into one aspect of the history and historiography of the revolution, and into its religious discourse only insofar as the Qurʾānic texts studied here shed light on it. That these texts do constitute a fundamental constituent of that discourse should become evident in the course of this inquiry.

Whether or not the movement which brought the ʿAbbāsids to power was really a "revolution" is a problem that need not be settled here. Two points seem, however, to be worth making. First, "revolution" or not, this episode is clearly a major event of early Islam: it brought about not only the destruction of the Umayyad caliphate (661-749)* but also major transformations in the social, political, tribal, military, administrative/bureaucratic, and cultural spheres of life.[3] There is much evidence of continuity, of course, between the Umayyad and the ʿAbbāsid periods, and this should not be ignored in making a case for the impact or significance of the ʿAbbāsid revolution.[4] But the ʿAbbāsid revolution was a landmark nevertheless, and has been recognized as such by medieval and modern scholars. Second, the ʿAbbāsid revolution is also one of the best documented episodes of early Islamic history. The sources on it are almost all literary, were compiled much later than the period they purport to describe, and raise a host of other problems. But in this case, unlike many other aspects and episodes of early Islamic history, we do at least have fairly extensive materials to work with.[5]

This study will be conducted at two levels, the historical and the historiographical. As an historical inquiry, it should not only throw some light on an important aspect of the ʿAbbāsid revolution, but also serve as a preliminary effort to examine the character of religious discourse in

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*Dates are according to the Gregorian Calendar. Where two dates are given, the first refers to the Hijra calendar, the second to the Gregorian.

early Islam and, equally, into the function of Qur'ānic materials in the making of such a discourse. Unfortunately, however, it is far from certain whether, or to what extent, the testimony of our traditional historical sources on the 'Abbāsid revolution ought to be accepted as historical fact and how much of it must be regarded, *inter alia*, as a retrospective reading of the past. Such questions and others, especially about the narrative structures of the accounts in which materials from the Qur'ān are employed, necessitate the second, namely historiographical, level of this inquiry.

In this study, we shall first assume that the sacred texts which, according to our sources, were invoked by the revolutionaries in various situations were indeed used *as* the sources claim they were. This procedure might strike some as odd, and the assumption gratuitous; but it seems to be perhaps the only way in which to form some idea of how, in the given circumstances, the 'Abbāsid religious discourse *might* have functioned, and what the sacred texts might have meant to particular audiences. In the second part of this work, we shall be concerned with the historiographical problems our material raises, and with what these problems mean for a study in religious discourse such as the present one.

In analyzing the meaning, purpose, and significance of the numerous references to the Qur'ān which occur in accounts of the 'Abbāsid revolution, this study argues that these scriptural materials are crucial to the historiographical representation and narrative constructions of that revolution. Whether the historical actors of the revolution "really" invoked the Qur'ān as they appear to have in the classical narratives is possible, though, as we shall see, unprovable in many instances and unlikely in many others. It is a major argument of this study that, irrespective of their "actual" use in the course of the revolutionary movement, these Qur'ānic materials—and historical traditions about their use in the context of the 'Abbāsid revolution—often play a vitally important role in the scheme and construction of the narratives which describe the revolution. The use of Qur'ānic materials in what purports to be the religious discourse of the 'Abbāsid revolution may tell us

something about the people and processes involved in the revolution and about the meaning and function of scripture in social and political contexts an enquiry into the use of these materials tells us much more, however, about the historiography of that revolution and about some of what went into the making of its narrative forms.

II

The use of materials from the Qur'ān, for purposes other than those of prayer and sermons, is of course widely attested in Islamic societies in all periods of their history.[6] The practice of inserting textual quotations from the Qur'ān in speech and writing *(taḍmīn)* has, for instance, always been very pervasive in the Islamic tradition. As Jacques Jomier has observed:

> ...textual quotations ... can be made with two aims. Sometimes writers wish to show their admiration for the Qur'ān by expressing their own ideas through celebrated verses. This is the procedure so many preachers adopt in their Friday sermons, which are laced with Qur'ānic texts and *hadīth*. At other times they may play upon the sensitivity of a cultured milieu in which the merest reference to the Qur'ānic text strikes up extraordinary reverberations. Thus they take advantage of the extremely widespread knowledge of the Qur'ānic text and of the fact that everyone is familiar with and respects it.[7]

The instances of such use in early Islam (or in other periods of Islamic history)—to which our literary-historiographical, epigraphic, numismatic, and other evidence attests—are too numerous to be surveyed in this essay. Nor, perhaps, would it be worth our while to do so unless it can

be shown that the public use of scriptural materials was not just edifying or ornamental, but rather *crucial* to the way in which certain ideas were articulated in a given social, political, or literary context.

That scriptural citations or allusions can and do occur in all sorts of contexts is not in question here. Given the centrality of the Qur'ān in Islamic law and theology and its impact on Arabic literature—the latter despite or, perhaps, *because* of the doctrine of its miraculous inimitability (*i'jāz*)—such is only to be expected. But a recognition of the authority of scripture, or its inimitability, does not entail that it would be invoked by all in the same way, or to mean the same thing, or that the same implications would be drawn by, say, all jurists from the fact of its authoritativeness in legal theory.[8] Consequently, it is instructive and important to examine how the Qur'ān, as scripture taken in its entirety or as particular scriptural texts, is invoked and interpreted by different people in different situations (or differently in similar situations). But such an exercise need not be limited to exegetes or theologians or legal theorists. The question how scriptural texts are handled, and what they are given out to mean, can equally be asked with reference to *historical* situations and their historiographical representations. The texts of exegetes, theologians, and legal theorists are usually themselves historically conditioned, so that it would be misleading to interpret them without reference to their historical context.[9] The use of such things as scripture in the course of a historical movement may, on the other hand, be taken to be *explicitly* responsive to the historical context where it occurs, in this case the history and historiography of the 'Abbāsid revolution. Consequently, to study the use of scripture in such a situation is to enquire into how scripture is said to have been interpreted at a given point in history, in an explicitly historical context, and how the meaning and significance of the historical episode in question is brought out through scripture.[10] Our only means of doing all this is by a study of 'Abbāsid historiography, as already noted. That historiography does not only give us variant accounts of how the Qur'ān was invoked during the revolution. It also raises the question how scriptural quotations might

serve to undergird a particular narrative (often differently in case of
different historians or their narratives) or even perhaps to construct
particular narratives.

The importance of studying the use and interpretation of
scriptural texts in historical contexts and, necessarily, in the
historiographical renditions of such contexts, should be evident from the
foregoing. Before we proceed to study the 'Abbāsid revolution from the
perspective defined above, some other instances of how the Qur'ān, or
materials from it, is reported to have been invoked in something like a
"significant" (as opposed, for instance, to either a liturgical or an
ornamental) sense in public life may be reviewed here.

III

Historians of Islamic art have often discussed the symbolic significance
of the Dome of the Rock, built in Jerusalem by the Umayyad caliph
'Abd al-Malik.[11] Precisely what prompted the caliph to have this
remarkable monument erected is the subject of much speculation but
remains uncertain. What is clear is that the Dome of the Rock was built
on a site which had profound religious associations for both the Jews and
the Christians. It has consequently been suggested with much plausibility
that, apart perhaps from other things, this monument signified the
political ascendancy of Islam and the symbolic supersession by Islam of
the earlier religions. As would be fitting for any edifice as significant in
symbolic terms, the Dome of the Rock has elaborate inscriptions, which
are especially important because they constitute the *earliest* appearance
of Qur'ānic verses on monumental architecture. These verses (Q.2:111;
Q.2:130; Q.2:256; Q.3:16-17; Q.3:25; Q.4:169-71; Q.6:12; Q.7:155;
Q.9:33; Q.17:3; Q.19:34-37; Q.24:35; Q.33:54; Q.57.2; Q.64.1;
Q.67:2; and Q.112)[12] serve to articulate what the Dome of the Rock as
a whole represents: a monumental introduction to Islam, so to speak, and

a powerful statement of its supplanting the earlier religious, and political, dispensations.

If Qur'ānic inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock had a political, and not only a moral or theological signification, the same would, *mutatis mutandis,* hold for the numerous scriptural invocations to which our sources attest in describing all kinds of socio-political movements and upheavals.[13] In a letter the caliph 'Uthmān is said to have written to the inhabitants of Mecca while besieged by rebels in Medina, he tried to justify his position, answer his critics, and warn against the dangers of revolt in terms of no less than nine quotations from the Qur'ān. This letter, as Stephen Humphreys has argued, is "a particularly clear and explicit example of the Qur'ān's power to define the meaning of a critical moment."[14] With this example as his point of reference, Humphreys goes on to suggest that the fundamental "paradigm"—of "Covenant, Betrayal, and Redemption"— according to which, he believes, historians of early Islam ordered their narratives, described events, and (implicitly) judged them is itself drawn from the Qur'ān.[15] We shall return to this suggestion later in this study. Here, some further illustrations of the public use of the Qur'ān ought to be noted.

The symbolic use of the Qur'ān was perhaps most spectacularly made during the first civil war in Islam: Mu'āwiyah's Syrian troops are said to have raised the Qur'ān (*muṣḥaf/maṣāḥif*) on their lances in the course of their military engagement with the troops of 'Alī to call for arbitration.[16] 'Alī himself is reported in fact to have done something similar on his own part earlier, during the battle of the Camel.[17] The persistent Khārijī slogan, *lā ḥukma illā li'llāh* ("judgement belongs to Allāh alone"), was also apparently an appeal to the verdict of God through the Qur'ān.[18] The Khawārij are also reported to have quoted passages from the Qur'ān in justification of their doctrinal or political or other positions.[19] For his part, 'Alī too is known to have invoked scriptural authority in arguing with the Khawārij.[20]

Apart from slogans which featured a general reference to the *"Kitāb Allāh"* — and instances of such slogans are too numerous to be

recounted[21] — various religio-political groups (other than the Khawārij) are also known to have invoked particular verses from the Qur'ān. The revolt of Ibn al-Ash'ath (81-84/701-704), one of the more serious upheavals in Umayyad Iraq, offers one (by no means unique) illustration.[22] This revolt was supported, among others, by a group of people who are designated in historical sources as the "*qurrā*'".[23] This designation has conventionally been understood as "Qur'ān reciters", which would suggest, if the rendering is correct, that "Qur'ān reciters" formed a distinct group and that they supported this revolt as some such group. One might go even further, and speculate that these individuals may have been led to justify their opposition to what they perceived to be an unjust and oppressive regime by their understanding of the teachings of the Qur'ān; for if they were indeed "Qur'ān reciters", after all, they stood in something of a special relationship to the sacred text. Nor is this the first occasion in early Islamic history that the *qurrā*' make their appearance. As a group designation, the term *qurrā*' is first used for some disaffected Arabs of the garrison town of Kufa in the reign of the caliph 'Uthmān.[24] If *qurrā*' means "Qur'ān reciters", one must again wonder how the Qur'ān might have figured in the moral, and political, consciousness of a select group of people who seem so emphatically to have claimed their identity in terms of their association with it.

The problem, however, is that not only is the relationship of the so-called *qurrā*' with the Qur'ān very uncertain, it is far from clear whether the term "*qurrā*'" should, in fact, be rendered "Qur'ān reciters" at all. It has been proposed that our *qurrā*' should rather be understood as *ahl al-qurā*, that is, villagers (the term *qurrā*' being derived in that case from the triliteral root *qāf-rā'-yā'*, rather than from *qāf-rā'-hamza*).[25] It would follow that the *qurrā*' who were involved in some disturbances in Kufa during the caliphate of 'Uthmān, or those, for instance, who supported the revolt of Ibn al-Ash'ath, were disaffected Arab tribesmen who had settled in villages in the conquered territories rather than "Qur'ān reciters". The problem with this hypothesis, however, is essentially the same as that with rendering *qurrā*' simply,

and invariably, as "Qur'ān reciters": instances of the use of the term do not admit of the unambiguous adoption of one sense to the exclusion of the other for *all* cases. There are contexts in which rendering *qurrā'* as villagers makes much better sense; and others where it doesn't. The point is not whether those who called themselves, or were called, *qurrā'* were experts in the reading of the Qur'ān, or necessarily very pious men, but rather that they *claimed* some kind of a special relationship with the Qur'ān (and some prestige on that basis[26]) and sought, consequently, to justify their particular grievances in terms of what they thought the Qur'ān stood for.[27]

Invocations of the Qur'ān in the 'Abbāsid revolution will be studied at some length in the following chapter and may therefore be left aside here. Occasions when the Qur'ān was part of religious discourse or assisted in the articulation of arguments relevant to an immediate social or political context are not lacking for the 'Abbāsid period either. Some such instances are worth noting.

In the civil war between the 'Abbāsids al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn (809-813), there apparently was many an occasion when the authority of the scripture or particular scriptural texts were invoked. Thus, al-Ma'mūn marked the declaration of his caliphate, and a victory over an army sent against him by al-Amīn, his brother and caliph in Baghdād, with the introduction of the so-called "victory verse", Q.30:4-5 on the dirham: "Allah's is the command (*al-amr*), in the past and in the future. On that day shall the believers rejoice in Allah's help to victory."[28] And about al-Ma'mūn's victorious general, Ṭāhir b. al-Husayn, whose troops were responsible for the capture of Baghdād and the murder of the deposed caliph al-Amīn, the following is reported by al-Ṭabarī:

> After Muhammad [al-Amīn] had been killed and the tumult had ceased, and after a guarantee of safety (*amān*) had been given to all and sundry and the people had become calm, Ṭāhir came into the city [sc. Baghdād] on Friday and led the people in worship, preaching to

them an eloquent sermon in which he quoted the [verses called] *al-Qawāri'* from the Qur'ān. Among what has been preserved of it is that he said: "Praise be to God, 'Master of kingship, who gives kingship to whom He will, and takes away kingship from whom He will; He exalts whom He will, and abases whom He will; in whose hand is the good; and He is powerful over everything.' (Q.3:26)—along with [other] verses of the Qur'ān, which he made to follow one after the other. He urged obedience and the maintenance of unity *(jamā'a)* and exhorted the people to hold fast to the rope of obedience....[29]

Ṭāhir b. Ḥusayn's invocation of the verses in question was clearly of direct relevance to the message — (1) the transfer of authority, (2) by the will of God, and (3) the necessity of surrendering to this authority — that he would have wanted to bring home to his audience. Nor is the historian's manifest concern with elaborately reporting (how faithfully? — we do not know) not just the purport, the general theme, of Ṭāhir's sermon, but also the highly apposite Qur'ānic verses he is believed to have recited on that occasion, without interest here. It may well be that our historian is no less aware of the significance, in the given context, of the Qur'ānic texts and allusions in question than the victorious 'Abbāsid general must have been.

Reciting apposite passages from the Qur'ān was a time honoured and often quite effective way to make a point. One Sahl b. Salāma, leader of a vigilante movement which erupted in Baghdad in the aftermath of the destructive civil war between al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn, is said to have made *his* point — "commanding the good, forbidding evil, and the need to act according to the Book of God and the *sunna* of His Prophet" — more graphically, by actually wearing a *mushaf* round his neck.[30] The caliph Ma'mūn, in whose early years of rule Sahl was active in Baghdad, was himself to bear witness to the symbolic significance of

the Qur'ān for him by instituting the "Inquisition" *(Miḥna)* towards the end of his reign. This procedure was ostensibly intended to enforce conformity of the religious scholars to the doctrine of the "createdness" of the Qur'ān. Whether the question of the Qur'ān's createdness was the real issue in the struggle between the caliph and the traditionalist scholars is a question which is best left aside here. That it was the Qur'ān which was called upon to serve as the *symbol* of this struggle is significant any way. Al-Ma'mūn's letters concerning the prosecution of the *Miḥna* are also quite remarkable specimens of the lavish use of Qur'ānic materials to bolster his argument for the createdness of the Qur'ān.

Instances of the public invocation of the Qur'ān, or the making of a religious discourse in scriptural terms, are, of course, scarcely unique to early or medieval Islam. In concluding this introductory survey, one final illustration ought to be considered, an illustration drawn from contemporary rather than early Islam. The so-called "fundamentalist" or "Islamic resurgence" movements of recent times, which seek to refashion Muslim societies through a renewed commitment to what they see as "true" (albeit often a radically reinterpreted) Islam, have often claimed that much of their ideology is derived, or derivable, directly from the Qur'ān.[31] Whatever the plausibility of such claims, or the precise relationship of the Qur'ān to the programmes of such movements — a question one would have to decide on individually for each of these movements—the Qur'ān does manifestly occupy a very conspicuous position in their religious discourse. Some of the most influential ideologues of such movements — Sayyid Quṭb of Egypt and Sayyid Abu'l-A'lā Mawdūdī of Pakistan, for instance—have written monumental exegeses of the Qur'ān. Extensive use of Qur'ānic materials, or appeals to the authority of the Qur'ān, is also widely attested in the course and aftermath of the Iranian revolution of 1978-79.[32] The significance of the use of the Qur'ān, nay, its centrality, in contemporary revivalist discourse is worth restating here. Muslim "fundamentalist" movements, for all their aspirations to model contemporary societies on early Islamic precedents, are *modern* movements, responding to the

multifaceted challenges of modernity and striving to redefine, and reassert, the place of Islam in the modern world.[33] Interpreting, or rather re-interpreting, the Qur'ān, and otherwise extensively invoking its authority becomes one of the principal ways, as Ellis Goldberg has argued, not only of articulating their own worldview, or of their *right* to interpret the Qur'ān afresh, but also of challenging many other, traditional interpretations of the Qur'ān and hence of Islam.[34] As at so many other times in Islamic history, then, at issue here is not the simple fact that the text or the authority of the Qur'ān is invoked by someone, but the question of what doing so means at a given moment and in a particular context. What follows is an effort to address this and other questions in inquiring into the history and historiography of a major episode, the 'Abbāsid revolution, in the history of early Islam.[35]

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TWO

The Religious Discourse of the 'Abbāsid Revolution

I

The oath of allegiance of the Hāshimī Shīʿa, the core of the 'Abbāsid movement, referred to the Qur'ān as part of the following formula: *ubāyiʿukum ʿalā Kitāb Allāh ʿazza wa jalla wa sunnat nabiyyihi ṣlʿm waʾl-ṭāʿah liʾl-riḍā min ahl bayt rasūl Allāh ṣlʿm* ("I pledge my allegiance to you upon the Book of God, the Mighty and the Exalted, upon the *Sunna* of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and upon the accepted one from the family of the Prophet, peace be upon him").[36] Likewise, the 'Abbāsid general Qaḥṭaba b. Shabīb is reported, on meeting the Umayyad ʿĀmir b. Ḍubārah in battle near Iṣfahān in 131/749, to have tied the Qur'ān to a lance and exhorted the Syrian army *ilā mā fī hādhaʾl-muṣḥaf* ("to what is contained in this Book").[37]

This kind of reference to the *Kitāb Allāh* during the 'Abbāsid movement evidently conforms to the widespread use of the collocation *Kitāb Allāh wa sunnat nabiyyih*, attested for rebels prior to the 'Abbāsid movement as well as later. Such manner of referring to the Qur'ān presupposed necessarily that the authority of the scripture was recognised by all concerned. What precisely was involved in or meant by thus

invoking scriptural authority is rather less likely to have been uniformly known to all. That would scarcely be a liability, however, for the necessity to precisely define what a particular movement stood for could thereby be averted. It has been proposed that a general reference to the authority of the Qur'ān was a common way of drawing attention to not very stringently articulated social and political grievances and to call for a regime of propriety and justice.[38] For those involved in the 'Abbāsid movement, this sort of reference to the Qur'ān may also have been intended to dispel suspicions and accusations about their religious orientations and their commitment to Islam.

The 'Abbāsid movement had originated as a Shī'ite movement which had, among its followers, some noticeably syncretistic and heterodox elements.[39] In the later phases of the movement, some of the more conspicuously heterodox leaders, such as one called Khidāsh, seem to have been disowned by the 'Abbāsid leadership.[40] Abū Muslim, the most important leader of the movement in Khurāsān during its final stages, was himself branded a *"sāhir"* by the last Umayyad governor of Khurāsān;[41] this characterization is interpretable as an acknowledgement of Abū Muslim's effectiveness in winning adherents to the cause he led, but it may also have carried with it a hint of heterodox belief and practice. In any case, Abū Muslim seems to have been very sensitive, and with good reason, to attacks on his religious image and on that of his movement.[42] Many religious scholars of Khurāsān are known, furthermore, to have refused to give their blessings to the revolutionary cause.[43] It is thus understandable that the 'Abbāsid revolutionaries should have been eager to emphasize their religiosity and their commitment to "mainstream" Islam.[44] If historical traditions to that effect are credible, invoking the Qur'ān on various public occasions would seem to have been an eminently suitable means to dispel doubts about their Islamic credentials.

Apart from references to scriptural authority, to the *Kitāb Allāh*, in a generalized manner, our sources also report specific references to particular Qur'ānic verses, especially during the last phases of the

'Abbāsid movement. 'Abbāsid propaganda seems to have been enriched and some of its themes precisely illustrated in terms of particular textual quotations from the Qur'ān. It was through these verses that many an important idea, which was part of the revolutionary ideology, was disseminated. Whether it was the people associated with the movement or, conversely, the historians of the 'Abbāsid revolution, who are responsible for the often fascinating connections between the revolution's ideological discourse and Qur'ānic texts is a question we shall examine later. However this discourse came about, its themes, and the place of the Qur'ān in it, remain worth analyzing.

II

A major theme which our sources attribute to the propaganda of the 'Abbāsid movement is its stress on the oppressive character of Umayyad rule, on the one hand, and the divinely ordained mission of the 'Abbāsid movement to bring an end to that oppression, on the other. This important idea was articulated in several different ways, and more than one passage from the Qur'ān was adduced in support.

At what is said to have been the inauguration of the 'Abbāsid *da'wa* — an event which the historical tradition locates at the turn of the first century of Islam — Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās, the then head of the 'Abbāsid family, is reported to have remarked that the passing of the century signalled the approaching end of the Umayyad rule. It was God's practice, he asserted, to restore, at the end of every hundred years, the rights to the rightful — in this instance, the *ahl al-Bayt*.[45] As justification for this conviction, he is reported to have cited Q.2:259, which speaks of God's having revived life (on a particular occasion) after the lapse of a hundred years. As the *Akhbār* reports it, the context in which this verse is invoked is messianic. Muḥammad b. 'Alī instructs his followers to begin their movement in earnest only with the passing of the hundredth year (of the Muslim calendar), which he

characterizes as "the year of the man of the donkey" (ṣāḥib al-ḥimār).
Asked what "the year of the man of the donkey" meant, the imām is said
to have quoted the verse in question:

> ... Or (take) the similitude of one who passed by a
> hamlet all in ruins to its roofs. He said: 'Oh! how shall
> Allāh bring it (ever) to life, after (this) its death?' But
> Allāh caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised
> him up (again)... (Q. 2:259).[46]

As the *Akhbār* reports it, Muḥammad b. 'Alī invoked only the foregoing
part of this verse. But the point about the ṣāḥib al-ḥimār would remain
unintelligible unless the latter part of this verse is also quoted; to the
audience of Muḥammad b. 'Alī (and/or to that of the *Akhbār*), the verse
may well have been so familiar as to render a full quotation unnecessary.
For us, however, the allusion alone would not suffice. The latter part of
this verse, Q.2:259, which is as follows, ought also to be kept in view:

> He said: "How long didst thou tarry (thus)?" He said:
> "(Perhaps) a day or part of a day." He said: "Nay, thou
> hast tarried thus a hundred years; but look at thy food
> and thy drink; they show no signs of age; and look at
> thy donkey; and that We may make of thee a sign unto
> the people, look further at the bones, how We bring
> them together and clothe them with flesh." When this
> was shown clearly to him, he said: "I know that Allah
> hath power over all things."

The Qur'ānic text here is evidently being quite considerably
stretched and strained to express what Muḥammad b. 'Alī would seem
to have in mind. But, however artificially, he does manage to imbed the
two messianic notions, that of the ṣāḥib al-ḥimār and of what may be
expected at the end of a hundred years, in a *Qur'ānic* context. In relating

the two to each other and to the hope that God would likewise regenerate the ('Abbāsid) cause of truth after it has all but choked, Muḥammad b. 'Alī is able at once to convince his followers of his religious insights as well as determine the appropriate moment when his partisans must finally launch their long awaited movement.

Also worth pondering about the foregoing historical tradition is more than a hint of determinism, of predestination, that it carries with it. *When* the movement for the overthrow of the Umayyads must start is quite as predetermined here as is the final outcome of that struggle. Whether this predeterminist mood is reflective of the (post-revolution) 'Abbāsid effort to justify their inaction against the Umayyads for the better part of the latter's rule,[47] or is rather an echo of an interest in predestinationist theology[48] need not be decided here.

The idea under discussion— that the time had come to get rid of Umayyad oppression — was also expressed through Q.22:39, which Abū Muslim al-Khurāsānī is reported to have publicly recited on 25 Ramādān, 129/17 September, 747. This was another very significant day in the history of the 'Abbāsid movement. This was the day when the clandestine movement in Khurāsān became an open revolt. To mark the event — long awaited and extensively prepared for — Abū Muslim is said to have unfurled two flags, *al-Ẓill* and *al-Saḥāb:* these had supposedly been sent for the occasion by the 'Abbāsid imām and were to accompany the revolutionary forces in their successful march on the seats of Umayyad power.[49] It was on this occasion that Abū Muslim is reported to have recited the following verse of the Qur'ān:

> To those against whom war is made permission is granted (to fight), because they are wronged — and verily, Allāh is Most Powerful for their aid. (Q.22.39).[50]

The historical importance of this verse is that it is, in Qur'ānic exegesis, generally believed to have been the *first* explicit permission to Muslims, who had been compelled to emigrate to Medina, to engage in

military struggle (*jihād*) against the unbelievers. It is of some interest to note too that those who had rebelled against the caliph 'Uthmān b. 'Affān are also reported to have invoked the same verse in their favour. That it pertained to *their* situation, or justified their oppositional stance, was however vigorously denied by the beleaguered caliph himself, who rather applied this verse to his own case.[51] The verse which follows this one is of a piece with it; though not reported to have been invoked by Abū Muslim, it may be quoted here inasmuch as it explains and justifies this permission:

> (They are) those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said: Our Lord is Allāh. Had it not been for Allāh's repelling some men by means of others, monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques, in which the name of Allāh is oft mentioned, would assuredly have been pulled down. Allāh will certainly aid those who aid His (cause) — for verily Allāh is full of strength, exalted in might. (Q.22:40).[52]

The significance of Q.22:39, which Abū Muslim is said to have recited in initiating his revolt, hardly needs much commentary. The claim which is being made for the righteousness of the 'Abbāsid cause is multifaceted: that this is the cause of the oppressed and the disaffected; that the struggle now being waged has been approved by God, and therefore constitutes *jihād*; that God will aid the disaffected who are engaged in it; and, needless to say, that those against whom this struggle is being waged cannot also be on the right path.

A related idea had, it is said, already been articulated in Qur'ānic diction by the 'Abbāsid imām Ibrāhīm in a communication to his followers in Khurāsān. The occasion was his appointment of Abū Muslim as head of the operations there, and the letter sought to apprise the Khurāsānīs of this appointment. The verse quoted has nothing to do with the choice or appointment of Abū Muslim, but it is directly relevant to,

and may indeed be deemed to be expressive of, the movement's
perception of itself as guided to victory by the will and promise of God:

> Allāh has promised, to those among you who believe
> and do good works, that He will surely make them to
> succeed (the present rulers [*la-yastakhlifannahum*]) in the
> earth even as He caused those who were before them to
> succeed (others); that He will establish in authority their
> religion — the one which He has chosen for them; and
> that He will change (their state), after the fear in which
> they (lived), to one of security and peace: "They will
> worship Me (alone) and not associate aught with Me." If
> any do reject faith after this, they are rebellious and
> wicked. (Q.24:55).[53]

III

The ideological justification of the 'Abbāsid revolt necessitated that a
case be made not only for the oppressiveness of the Umayyad regime,
but also for the latter's hostility towards Islam. The argument was that
the Umayyad rulers had been insincere to religion, had violated it, and
it was their religious insincerity which also explained their
oppressiveness. They therefore deserved the now inevitable divine
retribution, and the ('Abbāsid) revolutionaries were nothing if not the
instrument of such retribution.[54]

This idea seems to have been suggested, *inter alia*, in terms of
Q.35:42-43, which Abū Muslim is said to have quoted in a letter to the
then (and, as it turned out, the last) Umayyad governor of Khurāsān,
Naṣr b. Sayyār. This letter purports to have been written at a time when
Abū Muslim was already operating in the open and was quickly gaining
in strength. The letter he wrote was also significant because, for the very
first time, he failed to address Naṣr as "*amīr*", and thereby openly and

directly challenged the governor's authority and the legitimacy of those he represented. We will discuss the narrative constructions of this episode of the revolution's history later in our inquiry. What the Qur'ānic passage invoked in this letter may have been intended to signify is worth reflecting on here. But first the passage itself:

> They swore their strongest oaths by Allāh that if a warner came to them, they would follow his guidance better than any (other) of the peoples; but when a warner came to them, it has only increased their flight (from righteousness) — on account of their arrogance in the land and their plotting of evil. But the plotting of evil will hem in only the authors thereof. Now are they but looking for the way the ancients were dealt with? But no change wilt thou find in Allāh's way of dealing: no turning off wilt thou find in Allāh's way (of dealing). (Q.35.42-43).[55]

In the context of revolutionary activity against the Umayyad dynasty, this Qur'ānic text would seem to be quite meaningful. In a general way, of course, it asserts God's displeasure with those who are insincere in their faith, and promises divine nemesis for their insincerity. In the particular context of anti-Umayyad propaganda where this passage was invoked, this manner of indictment would be damaging enough. But the passage seems, in this context, to have had other, more subtle nuances as well which should be pointed out.

The Qur'ānic passage states that the people being described outwardly professed their commitment to the truth, but backed out once actually confronted with this truth. It is scarcely fanciful to imagine that this statement, when applied in a highly charged atmosphere of political confrontation to the Umayyads, may have been used as a denunciation of their religious claims and pretensions.

It was not long ago that the Umayyads were generally held by scholars to have been an essentially "secular" line of worldly "kings", who were oblivious of matters religious, even hostile to them. This impression, which may have been both created and exploited by opponents of the Umayyad regime already under that regime, was to become a dominant theme of the way the Umayyads were later remembered, especially by historians of the 'Abbāsid period. To the legitimist concerns of the 'Abbāsids, it seems to have been necessary not only to have themselves portrayed as pious and God-fearing defenders of the faith, but also to have the Umayyads depicted as the very embodiment of secular Realpolitik. It has now come to be increasingly recognised, however, that such a view of the Umayyad rulers is essentially an ideological one, that it is fundamentally flawed, and that the Umayyads too had serious — and, to many of their subjects, credible — religious claims and concerns.[56]

That the Umayyad caliphs did in fact have elaborate religious claims for themselves, that they liked, for instance, to have themselves regarded as "God's caliphs", does not necessarily mean, however, that they could not have been *considered* impious by those opposed to them. Various kinds of grievances against the ruling house might after all be interpreted and justified in religious terms, that is, as *religious* grievances, and as resulting from what might be *perceived* as the rulers' indifference, insincerity, or hostility towards religion.

There is little doubt that those who brought about the 'Abbāsid revolution, or at least initially sympathized with its programme, had a poignant consciousness of disprivilege. The unredressed grievances of the *mawālī*,[57] the frustrations of the Arab tribesmen in Khurāsān (who thought they were made to pay for having exchanged a military past for a sedentary present)[58], the insecurities and resentments of the military factions of the empire,[59] and the alienation of Shī'ite groups, all helped build a coalition of resentment against the Umayyads. Religion was the idiom in whose terms resentment over mundane grievances tended typically to be expressed. What particular groups may have meant by

their religious slogans was probably quite different things, though, as already noted, a call for "justice" in some sense was invariably involved.[60] Now the Umayyads, inasmuch as they were somehow recognized to be the *cause* of this injustice, could be viewed as not simply unjust, but also as irreligious. In what was something of a circular view, they would have been thought to be unjust *because* they were irreligious, and irreligious because they were deemed unjust.[61] All the ills afflicting society could therefore simply be explained in terms of this impiety, of this insincerity of the Umayyads towards Islam, and revolt against them could thus be justified on moral grounds. This perceived or alleged insincerity which would make the caliphs' religious claims amount to naught, leaving them as mere pretensions, which were even more blameworthy for being such.

In Abū Muslim's invocation of Q.35:42-43, it is probably not incorrect therefore to read the message that religious claims made on the part of the rulers need not mislead or delude anyone for they lacked sincerity. Had they been an expression of sincerity, the rulers *themselves* would have welcomed the 'Abbāsid propaganda, which only sought the preservation and promotion of the "true" religion. The fact that they opposed it, and sought to crush the movement which stood for it, was sufficient proof of the insincerity of the Umayyads towards religion. The movement of course would not be crushed because it was only an instrument of what really was divine retribution, and represented the unrelenting divine verdict against the ruling house. But opposition to it did nevertheless expose the Umayyads.

In addition to what has already been said, Q.35:42-43 had some messianic connotations too. A brief excursus into the messianic appeal of the 'Abbāsid movement should bring these out.[62]

The work done so far on various aspects of the 'Abbāsid movement has highlighted, *inter alia*, the contribution of popular receptivity to messianic hopes and apocalyptic beliefs in the making of the 'Abbāsid revolution.[63] Messianic ideas had been invoked in earlier revolts against the Umayyads too, but it was the *du'āt* of the 'Abbāsid

movement who were able to reap the cumulative harvest of messianic expectancy. Messianic beliefs centred on the person of the Mahdī,[64] whose imminent advent the ʿAbbāsid propagandists fervently promised. Abu'l-ʿAbbās, the first ʿAbbāsid caliph, is reported to have had the messianically suggestive titles "al-Saffāḥ"[65], "al-Mahdī" and "al-Qāʾim".[66] The second ʿAbbāsid caliph adopted the title "al-Manṣūr", also a highly charged messianic epithet.[67] His son and successor was later given the title "al-Mahdī", which is how he is best remembered by in history. Clearly, then, the ʿAbbāsid movement had a pronounced messianic aspect to its propaganda; and even after the revolution, the first caliphs remained conscious of the need to symbolically redeem, through their regnal titles, the messianic expectations aroused and promises made during the revolutionary movement.

One of the functions of messianism — in Islamic history, at any rate — is to conjure up images of a golden past, which is then contrasted with the oppressive present: a destruction of this present and the restoration of that past is sought. The Mahdī thus is essentially conceived as a "restorer", one who would restore Islam to its pristine purity and Muslims to their primeval righteousness. Given the messianically charged milieu of the ʿAbbāsid movement, it is scarcely surprising that there should have been frequent references to early Islam in the course of the movement. Such references essentially took the form of drawing conscious parallels between certain episodes of early Islam and certain occasions in the course of the ʿAbbāsid movement, and, more generally, between the rise of Islam and the ʿAbbāsid revolution.

Bukayr b. Māhān, one of the architects of the ʿAbbāsid movement, is, for instance, said to have been conscious — and to have made others aware as well — of explicit Qurʾānic and early Islamic precedents when he appointed his seventy duʿāt and twelve nuqabāʾ to organize and conduct the movement in Khurāsān.[68] He located the justification — or rather, the authority — for the former number in Q.7:155: "And Moses chose seventy of his people for Our place of meeting…"; and for the latter figure, he is believed to have adduced

Q.5:12: "... and We appointed *twelve* chieftains [*naqīb*] among them..."
(*scil.* from among the Banū Isrā'īl). But the justification for the two
figures was also drawn from the Prophet Muḥammad's* own precedent:
on the occasion of the pledge of 'Aqaba, seventy people from among the
Medinese had sworn their oath of loyalty to him, and twelve of these he
had made *naqībs*. It was with good reason therefore that Abū Hāshim
supposedly informed his following: "Your *sunna* is the *sunna* of the
Banū Isrā'īl and of the Prophet [Muhammad], peace be upon him."[69]
What the 'Abbāsid movement claimed, in general, to be seeking was a
revival of the *sunna* of the Prophet; putting their audience in mind of
concrete instances of that *sunna* — the twelve *naqībs*, for instance —
would be one of several reminders (if the historical tradition to this effect
is at all credible) of their all-embracing commitment to the *sunna* of the
Prophet. Jacob Lassner's assessment of the significance of this
commitment goes a step further: "To retrace the steps of the Prophet
had", he says, "an almost magical quality. A former truth proclaimed
was a truth recreated. The strategies that led to previous triumphs were
the guarantees of future success. It was as though invoking memories of
the past was sufficient to overcome the most discouraging of
contemporary obstacles."[70]

     In the context sketched out above, the Qur'ānic passage
(Q.35:42-43) which Abū Muslim is reported to have invoked, would
seem to have been very suggestive indeed. The verses describe the state
of religious expectancy immediately before the rise of Islam. The Jewish
and Christian faith had once represented the truth but had, by then,
become "corrupted". Their scriptures did, however, promise a "warner",
and in these verses the Meccan idolaters are represented as assuring them
that were such a warner to come they would immediately become his
followers. That such a warner did come, but the pagans went back on

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*The usual invocation of blessings on the Prophet may be understood to accompany his
name here and elsewhere in this study.

their word and refused to heed his message only points to their incurable religious insincerity.

What these verses signify in the context of the 'Abbāsid movement is not hard to imagine. Posing as messianic redeemers, the 'Abbāsids were keen to project themselves as objects of this expectancy, the instruments of divine will, the medium through which the pristine purity of early Islam would once and for all be re-enacted.[71] With such a context in view, the Qur'ānic verses in question would serve, among other things, to draw parallels between the original *nadhīr*, the first warner who inaugurated the new religious dispensation, and the messianic figure who would restore it. The ('Abbāsid) restorers of the original dispensation are thereby accorded a highly exalted genealogy — the link with the first "warner", a *spiritual* genealogy to complement the close kinship the 'Abbāsids claimed with the Prophet — and the significance of their restoration linked to that of the first mission.

The parallel of the 'Abbāsid revolution with the advent of Islam is also suggested by a report according to which al-Manṣūr, the second 'Abbāsid caliph, recited Q.5:3 in the course of a khuṭba at Mecca. The verse describes Allāh's completion of His religion and His choice of Islam as the final religion for mankind; the full context of this tradition is given by al-Balādhurī as follows:

> Al-Manṣūr delivered a sermon on the day of 'Arafa, in which he said: "O people, I am the authority of God on His earth *(sulṭān Allāh fī ardihi)*; I govern you with the ability [granted to me by God], by His direction and guidance. I am His treasurer over His wealth and over His *fay'*; I act in their respect with His will and I distribute them with His wish and His command. God has made me a lock over them, and when He wants to open me He does so. So draw towards Allāh, and ask Him on this noble day — [the day] on which He has given you the bounty of which he speaks in his book

> when He says: 'This day have I perfected your religion
> for you, completed My favour upon you, and have
> chosen for you Islam as religion' (Q.5:3) — to enable
> me to do what is right, to direct me to good sense, to
> inspire me with compassion for you and [with the
> ability] to distribute your pensions among you with
> justice and beneficence.[72]

A remarkably high-sounding appraisal of the caliph's position is
being attributed here to al-Mansūr. We need not try to determine the
historicity of this anecdote, nor even decide precisely what it is supposed
to mean. For our purposes here, it is only the invocation of Q.5:3 which
is of interest. The significance of this verse is that it is generally believed
to have been the *last* verse of the Qur'ān to have been revealed to the
Prophet Muhammad. The occasion was the Prophet's "Farewell
Pilgrimage" to Mecca in 10/632. In the tradition under discussion, al-
Mansūr — the kinsman of the Prophet and his temporal successor — is
shown to be mindful of being in the same place at the same time as the
Prophet was when the said verse, marking the completion of his mission,
was revealed to him. What this tradition seeks to suggest therefore is that
with the advent of the 'Abbāsids, Allāh has *again* shown His favour, that
the domination of His true religion has once again been accomplished,
and that this caliph is now the symbol of God's favour on earth.

IV

Whether or not what our sources have to say about references to the
Qur'ān during the 'Abbāsid movement is trustworthy, it should be clear
from the foregoing that scriptural invocations in 'Abbāsid religious
discourse were *not* intended simply for religious edification, but seem
calculated to make a definite point and to convey a quite precisely

formulated idea. The following examples should illustrate this point a bit
further.

    The 'Abbāsid movement had, as already noted, been brought
out in the open in 747. The movement continued to win supporters and
gain strength, and finally, towards the end of 747 or early in 748,[73] Abū
Muslim and his men were able to enter Marv, the capital of Khurāsān.
In Marv, Naṣr b. Sayyār, the Umayyad governor, and 'Alī al-Kirmānī,
the leader of the Yemeni Arab tribes in Khurāsān, were still locked in
intra Arab, tribal conflict. Abū Muslim dexterously manipulated the
situation to the advantage of the movement he led, and though ostensibly
siding with al-Kirmānī against Naṣr, played off one against the other.
What interests us here is the Qur'ānic verse which Abū Muslim is
reported to have recited at the moment of his entry into Marv; the intra
tribal conflict between Naṣr and al-Kirmānī forms the context in which
the immediate relevance and significance of this verse is to be
appreciated:

> And he entered the city at a time when its people were
> not watching; and he found there two men fighting —
> one of his own people, and the other, of his foes...
> (Q.28:15).[74]

The meaning and significance of this verse *in the context* in which it is
supposed to have been recited by Abū Muslim is best summed up in the
words of M. Sharon: "The choice of this verse by the chroniclers of the
Da'wah is not accidental. The association of the Umayyad rule with the
wicked rule of Pharaoh and the 'Abbāsids with the God-sent Prophet and
deliverer, Moses, was a common theme in the repertoire of the 'Abbāsid
propagandists. In this case, the quarrelling in the city described in the
Qur'ān could easily be superimposed on the situation in Marw before the
entry of the new Moses, Abū Muslim."[75] There is another conceivable
way as well in which the use of this verse may have been intended in our
narratives: the neat precision with which particular situations during the

'Abbāsid revolution could be shown to conform to Qur'ānic descriptions of other events was nothing short of the miraculous. Could such appositeness not perhaps be taken to be yet another hint of divine sanction for the revolutionary cause?

The Moses/Pharaoh imagery[76] is again, more forcefully, invoked with reference to Q.2:50, in the context of the decisive 'Abbāsid victory over the Umayyad troops. The battle was fought near the Greater Zāb river in Iraq in 749, the ill-fated Umayyad troops were commanded by Marwān II (who, as the outcome of this battle established, was to be the last Umayyad caliph), and the 'Abbāsids by 'Abdallāh b. 'Alī, a paternal uncle of the first 'Abbāsid caliph. "More were drowned that day than were slain in battle", al-Ṭabarī reports,[77] a fact which is especially relevant in that it supplies part of the context for 'Abdallāh b. 'Alī's recitation of Q.2:50 on the occasion. The verse describes the Israelites being saved by God as they made their exodus: they were enabled to safely cross the river, while the Pharaoh and his men who were pursuing them were drowned:

> And remember We divided the sea for you and saved
> you and drowned Pharaoh's people within your sight.
> (Q.2:50).[78]

This Qur'ānic verse is, of course, intended as more than a comment on the way the Umayyad troops met their end. It seeks, as well, and perhaps more than anything else, to attach the whole set of images associated with the figure of the Pharaoh in the Muslim tradition to the Umayyad caliph and his troops. Needless to say, if the Pharaoh, and the Umayyads are doomed to destruction, the identity of the saved, the chosen of God, is not in question now any more than it ever was.

When news of this victory reached Abu'l-'Abbās al-Saffāh, who had already been proclaimed caliph at Kūfa, the latter offered prayers of thanks. To commemorate the occasion and to bring out the full

significance of what was being celebrated, he also recited, it is said, the following passage from the Qur'ān:

> When Ṭālūt set forth with the armies, he said: "Allāh will test you at the stream; if any drinks of its water, he goes not with my army; only those who taste not of it will go with me; a mere sip out of the hand is excused." But they all drank of it, except a few. When they crossed the river — he and the faithful ones with him — they said: "This day we cannot cope with Goliath and his forces." But those who were convinced that they must meet Allāh said: "How oft, by Allāh's will, hath a small force vanquished a big one? Allāh is with those who steadfastly persevere." When they advanced to meet Goliath and his forces, they prayed: "Our Lord! Pour out constancy on us and make our steps firm: help us against those that reject faith." By Allāh's will they routed them; and David slew Goliath; and Allāh gave him power and wisdom (al-mulk wa'l-ḥikma) and taught him whatever (else) He willed. (Q.2:249-51).[79]

In terms as free of equivocation as one can wish for, the invocation of this scriptural passage is intended to affirm and illustrate divine vindication of the righteousness of the 'Abbāsid cause. It is, in fact, not only divine support which is being claimed here, but also the moral fibre of those fighting in the just cause — men who had *already* showed their mettle and who therefore deserved the rich fruits of victory. Some more subtle connotations also seem to be involved in the invocation of this passage, however, and these ought to be noticed too.

In Muslim exegesis, Ṭālūt (= the Biblical Saul) was not just the first king of Israel, he was *chosen by God* for this function.[80] Likewise, Dā'ūd (the Biblical David), who succeeded Ṭālūt, was granted royal authority *by God*. The idea that the authority the 'Abbāsids had now won

had been granted to them, and consecrated, by God is thus clearly intended here. Nor is it without significance that, like the 'Abbāsid revolutionaries, Dā'ūd and his men are also believed (in 'Abbāsid historiography, at any rate) to have worn black garments when they went to combat against Goliath.[81] Finally, it should be remarked that in Qur'ānic exegesis, the number of people who passed Ṭālūt's ordeal by water is often equated with the number of Muslims who participated in the battle of Badr, the first major military engagement between the followers of the Prophet and the Meccan unbelievers of the tribe of Quraysh.[82] Reference to Ṭālūt and his troops is common in history and *hadīth* in the context of the battle of Badr.[83] The elaborate reference to the victory of Ṭālūt in the form of the Qur'ānic passage quoted above is likely also to have served, then, in evoking memories of and parallels with the early days of Islam, in this case the battle of Badr, which itself used to be compared to the victory of Ṭālūt.

V

Some of the occasions on which references to the Qur'ān are said to have been made were, according to the historical tradition, occasions of disputation and debate between partisans of the revolutionary movement in Khurāsān and their Umayyad opponents. Several accounts in the *Akhbār al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya* depict such situations, all complete with the contents of the disputations and their outcome. Given the manifestly pro-'Abbāsid character of the *Akhbār*, it is not much of a surprise that it is the supporters of the 'Abbāsid cause who invariably get the better of their opponents. The two camps — at least the 'Abbāsids at any rate — appear, in fact, to have had their *mutakallimūn*[84], and as Abū Muslim prepared for armed combat, he also made sure, if the *Akhbār's* testimony on this account is given credence, that his *mutakallimūn* carried the day in disputation as well. The *Akhbār* presents these disputations as *public* events: these were occasions when partisans of the movement had the

opportunity to effectively combat the allegations of their opponents, and to revive thereby not only the zeal of those already in their camp but also to convert many others to their cause. Later in this essay, we shall return to these disputations to see what to make of them. Here only some of the references to the Qur'ān which are said to have been made in the course of these disputations need be noted.

According to the *Akhbār*, it was on the alleged "un-Islamic" character of their preference for the Yemeni tribes, as opposed to the "Northern" Arab tribal faction of the Muḍar, that the partisans of the movement were challenged in one such disputation. The Prophet himself, it was pointed out to them, was from the Muḍar: what better argument could there be *for* the Muḍar, and *against* the ʿAbbāsids for their prejudice regarding the latter. But the revolutionaries, we are told, had a ready answer. Reminding his opponents of the famous Qur'ānic verse (Q.33:21), "You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a good pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day...", the veteran leader Sulaymān b. Kathīr argued that the Prophet had himself favoured "the Yemenīs (*ahl al-Yaman*) for their obedience and faith, and kept away from his tribe and kinsmen for their unbelief and disobedience."[85] A familiar grievance against the tribal preferences of the revolutionaries is thus turned on its head, not just to vindicate ʿAbbāsid policy but also as proof of their unfailing commitment to the *sunna* of the Prophet. Nevertheless, Abū Muslim did clarify that the Muḍar too might join the ranks of the movement. The imām had warned him against them, he said, because most of them were followers of the Umayyads; but those who weren't, the good ones among them, were to be welcomed. The down-trodden in general were the favourite audience of the revolutionary call, a point Abū Muslim is said to have made once again with reference to a Qur'ānic verse. This is the verse which, from the ʿAbbāsid revolution to the Iranian revolution of 1978-79, has given many a revolutionary movement its preferred battle cry:

And We wished to be gracious to those who were being oppressed in the earth [*ustuḍ 'ifū fī 'l-arḍ*]. To make them leaders [*a'imma*] and make them heirs [*al-wārithīn*]. (Q.28:5).[86]

On another occasion when a disputation is said to have taken place between representatives of Abū Muslim and those of Naṣr b. Sayyār, one Abu'l-Ḥakam 'Īsā b. A'yān from the former's camp gave the following account of his movement's creed:

We are a people whose lord is Allāh, Muḥammad — peace be upon him — is our Prophet, the Ka'ba — the inviolable house — is our *qibla*, the acceptable one from the family of the [Prophet] Muḥammad (*al-Riḍā min āl Muḥammad*) is our imām; we summon you to the Book of Allāh, to the *sunna* of his Prophet — peace be upon him — to reviving what the Qur'ān has revived and extinguishing what the Qur'ān has extinguished, and to the acceptable one from the family of the Prophet. "O our people, harken to the one who invites (you) to Allah, and believe in him: He will forgive you your faults, and deliver you from a grievous penalty. If any does not harken to the one who invites (us) to Allah, he cannot frustrate (Allah's plan) on earth, and no protectors can he have besides Allāh..." (Q.46:31-32).[87]

Striking in this concise statement of the 'Abbāsid movement's ideology is the use of exclusively religious and very high sounding, if somewhat vague, formulae. The concern to assert the "orthodox" credentials of the movement is manifest, as is the claim to *this movement's* having been divinely entrusted with the mission to call people to righteousness. The call to revive what *the Qur'ān* has revived, etc., is also of considerable interest, and would seem to accord well with

the extensive use of Qur'ānic materials as part of the religious rhetoric
in the course of the 'Abbāsid movement.

VII

We finally turn to a theme which was probably one of the most
significant in the religious discourse of the 'Abbāsid revolution. This
concerned the rights of the *ahl al-Bayt* — the "family of the Prophet" —
to the political headship of Islam. Shī'ite and pro-Shī'ite groups of the
Umayyad period maintained that only a member of the family of the
Prophet had the right to the Prophet's succession and, therefore, to the
political headship of Islam after him. On this view, the Umayyads, who
did not belong to the Prophet's family, were usurpers and their rule
illegitimate. Significantly, the Umayyads too may have claimed, and
been regarded by their supporters, as *ahl al-Bayt*, though only in the
sense of being the leading or the ruling family among the Arabs rather
than on account of any claims to close kinship with the Prophet.[88] It was
rather more usual to consider only the family of the Prophet as the *ahl
al-Bayt*. But, even in this limited sense, it is far from certain whether,
during the first century of Islam, it was only the 'Alid household which
was exclusively regarded as such or other members of the clan of
Hāshim as well, including the 'Abbāsids. That the 'Abbāsids *regarded
themselves* as part of the *ahl al-Bayt* is fairly certain, however.

In any case, as already observed, the movement which brought
the 'Abbāsids to power was carried on, with studied ambiguity, in the
name of *al-Riḍā min āl Muḥammad* — "the acceptable one from the
family of the Prophet Muḥammad".[89] The Riḍā could have meant
someone from the 'Alids or the 'Abbāsids, but had to unambiguously
mean a member of the Prophet's household, which seems to have been
the fundamental stipulation. Privately, the 'Abbāsid leadership probably
hoped, at least in the later stages of the movement, to have one of their
own as the Riḍā; but for public purposes, and in 'Abbāsid propaganda

prior to the revolution, the term, for all its extensive use, remained very ambiguous. It was only with the public pronouncement of the caliphate of Abu'l-'Abbās in 749 that the hitherto elusive Riḍā came to be identified.

The inaugural speech of Abu'l-'Abbās, the first 'Abbāsid caliph, is unsurprisingly reported in more than one version. All versions have allusions and references to the Qur'ān, but *do not* have all the Qur'ānic material in common. Al-Ṭabarī's version is the most detailed as well as the richest in references to the Qur'ān.[90] There are at least two direct references to the *ahl al-Bayt* in this version:

> And Allāh only wishes to remove all abomination from you, ye Members of the Family (*ahl al-Bayt*), and to make you pure and spotless. (Q.33:33);

and

> Say: "No reward do I seek of you for this except the love of those near of kin." (Q.42:23).[91]

The latter verse also appears on a coin bearing the date 128, which was minted at Jayy, in Iṣfahān. This coin was probably issued during the short-lived ascendancy there of 'Abdallāh b. Mu'āwiya, a Shī'i leader who at one time was apparently being supported by some of the 'Abbasids themselves.[92] The same verse also appears in the coins that Abū Muslim later had minted.[93]

In al-Ṭabarī's version, another verse Abu'l-'Abbās is said to have invoked refers to the Prophet's being commanded, in the beginning of his mission, to summon his near of kin, the *'ashīra al-aqrabīn*, to righteousness (Q.26:214). Two other verses (Q.59: 7 and Q.8:41) which he is said to have quoted on this occasion refer to the share of the Prophet and others in the spoils of war. The point these two verses are meant to make in this speech is, of course, that the special share of the Prophet and his kin in spoils of war implies their special rights in general (and to the political headship of Islam in particular), that these rights and

privileges are recognized in the Qur'ān itself, and that everyone must therefore acknowledge them too.

Al-Balādhurī's version of Abu'l-'Abbās' speech is somewhat shorter than al-Ṭabarī's.[94] The reference to Q.33:33 is there, but not the other Qur'ānic quotations which are found in al-Ṭabarī. Rather, it is another verse, Q.28:5, which figures in al-Balādhurī's version; and whereas al-Ṭabarī's account only has Abu'l-'Abbās allude, *en passant*, to part of this verse[95], al-Balādhurī's version makes the new caliph expressly invoke it *as* a Qur'ānic verse. These differences in the two versions raise important historiographical questions, and it is to these that we must now turn.

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THREE

Problems in the Historiography of the 'Abbāsid Revolution

I

We have tried in the foregoing to document what Qur'ānic verses are reported to have been invoked during the 'Abbasid revolution, the narrative contexts in which they occur, and the relevance of these verses to or their significance in the given contexts. Our study so far has taken the historical traditions about these Qur'ānic references at face value, so to speak; that is, we have usually assumed that the various actors in the 'Abbāsid movement did so invoke the Qur'ān, and we have tried, *on this assumption*, to assess the meaning and significance of scriptural references in their given contexts.

　　How certain can we be of the authenticity of the historical traditions we have been dealing with? Is it not possible that the traditions depicting frequent invocations of the Qur'ān in the course of the 'Abbāsid movement are only later inventions of pro-'Abbāsid historians, meant, *inter alia*, to present the movement in an "orthodox" Islamic colour? Could it be that references to the Qur'ān, with which narratives

of the ʿAbbāsid movement are interspersed, were not made at all during
the movement itself? And if the sources claim that they were, could this
not be one more instance of the tendentious presentation and later
reworking of accounts of which many a historian is often suspected?
After all, the early ʿAbbāsids did try to have history rewritten in many
ways: the participation of heterodox and "extremist" elements in the
movement was later de-emphasized or glossed over, for instance; the
story of the "testament" of Abū Hāshim may, likewise, have been the
product of a time when the early ʿAbbāsids were striving to claim
political legitimacy *through* an ʿAlid, and when they later abandoned this
effort, this historical fiction — if it is indeed such — was also allowed
to be forgotten.[96] It may be possible to argue, then, that after the
revolution the early ʿAbbāsids wanted to present a religiously edifying
picture of the movement through which they had come to power, so that,
together with other means of doing so, scriptural passages were made
integral to narratives describing the origins of the new dynasty.

Important though it is, the question of factual authenticity is not
the only problem that presents itself here. Also of considerable interest
is the *function* of the Qurʾānic texts in the narratives of which they are
now part. Though necessarily related to the former, the latter is a
separate question. For even if it can be shown that the connections
between particular Qurʾānic texts and given situations of the ʿAbbāsid
revolution are the work not of those actually involved in that revolution
but only of later historians writing about it, it would still be necessary to
consider what the scriptural passages which occur in given historical
narratives mean there and how they contribute to the making of these
narratives. We shall briefly return to this problem towards the end of this
chapter and again in the epilogue. A systematic study of the function of
scriptural passages in historical narratives must, however, be postponed
for another occasion.[97]

That traditions about scriptural invocations during the ʿAbbāsid
revolution raise many disquieting questions has already been observed.
Before demonstrating the point in some detail, we ought to point out,

however, that it would be too simplistic to attribute the sometimes apt, sometimes strained, but in general quite extensive invocations of Qur'ānic materials *exclusively* to historians of the 'Abbāsid revolution. For one thing, there is some numismatic evidence which attests to the use of Qur'ānic verses on coins issued by Shī'ite rebels — including Abū Muslim — in the course of their struggle against Umayyad authorities. Such evidence is rather limited, but it is not insignificant; and there is, of course, other and quite considerable numismatic evidence for the use of Qur'ānic materials on Umayyad as well as 'Abbāsid coinage. If scriptural motifs were regularly to be seen on Islamic coins, for instance, it should, in principle, come as no surprise if we also encounter their use elsewhere. As we have previously observed, the Qur'ān was invoked both by those in authority — to consecrate that authority, to justify the manner of its exercise, and so forth — and, no less, by those challenging their right to wield or exercise it. Even the "extremist" Shī'ite sectaries (the so-called *ghulāt*) of the Umayyad period, whose beliefs and practices had at best a very tenuous relationship with those of most Muslims, are known often to have articulated their religious discourse (insofar as they had a religious discourse, that is) in terms and concepts explicitly drawn from the Qur'ān.[98]

In principle, then, there is little to be gained from insisting that references to the Qur'ān could not have been made in the course of the 'Abbāsid movement itself. Such may, in fact, be taken to be the more likely given the quite well-attested concern of those involved in the movement to dispel doubts about their religious convictions and assert their rectitude. It is hardly unreasonable to assume that the agents of the movement in Khurāsān, who had to win and keep the moral support of their audiences before they could hope to accomplish anything on the battlefield, would have invoked the Qur'ān to silence their critics, to win in disputation with their opponents, and to impress upon their audiences their moral earnestness. This is precisely what many of the references to the Qur'ān which have been analyzed in the foregoing seem designed to accomplish. Other references were intended to underscore a particular

idea, or to apply a Qur'ānic promise to the case of the supporters of the movement, or a Qur'ānic threat to its opponents, as already shown.

Nevertheless, if it can, in principle, be contended that the *possibility* of the use of Qur'ānic materials during the 'Abbāsid movement must be granted, the claims of our historical sources in this regard also raise many suspicions and can hardly be given unqualified credence. In the remaining part of this chapter, we shall reexamine some of the foregoing historical traditions and accounts, as well as others, in order to form some understanding of the historiographical problems we are faced with. This historiographical enquiry is conducted here with reference to only one aspect of the 'Abbāsid revolution — the use of Qur'ānic texts in accounts of that episode — but our conclusions should also tell us something about the character of our sources and the problems of early Islamic historiography *in general*.

II

The first set of historiographical problems centres on uncertainties about several of the historical "facts" which comprise the narratives of the 'Abbāsid revolution. Some of the reports about the occasions when, during the 'Abbāsid movement, particular verses of the Qur'ān were quoted are likely to be fictitious, if only because these occasions themselves may never have existed, or did not exist quite the way historical narratives would have us believe. The following three examples should suffice to illustrate the point.

First, the reference to Q.2:259 ("Or [take] the similitude of one who passed by a hamlet...") is, as already noted, part of a messianic prophecy attributed to Muḥammad b. 'Alī, the person with whom our historiographical tradition associates the beginnings of the 'Abbāsid movement. The prophecy is supposed to have been made before the year 100 of the Muslim calender and describes, for the benefit of the imām's followers, some of the signs which must appear before the movement

against the Umayyads can be properly initiated. The point of this tradition is not merely to certify the clairvoyance of Muhammad b. 'Alī but also to locate the beginnings of the 'Abbāsid *da'wa* in the messianically significant moment of the turn of the century and, perhaps most importantly, to show that Muḥammad b. 'Alī was already acknowledged to be the leader of this movement.[99] Quite apart from the failure of this tradition's messianic idiom to inspire much confidence, it is anything but certain that the origins of the *da'wa* in Khurāsān are precisely to be located in the year 100. Least likely of all, however, is the claim that *Muḥammad b. 'Alī* was already associated with this movement and was guiding its fortunes. It is only very much later — probably not before 125/743, if Sharon's dating is accepted — that the 'Abbāsids can be recognized with some certainty to have become definitely involved with the movement which bears their name or to have begun to be regarded in certain closed circles as its leaders.[100] There is every reason to suspect, therefore, that Muḥammad b. 'Alī's supposed reference to Q.2:259 is no earlier than is the story of his association with the movement in Khurāsān.

The second example concerns a Qur'ānic reference which has not so far been examined in this study. It takes some stretch of the imagination to see the relevance of this verse to the context in which it is invoked. The context is the imām's (Muḥammad b. 'Alī's) explanation to some of his followers why Khurāsān was the best place to start the movement against the Umayyads, and why Syria and other regions of the Muslim world were not suited for the purpose. The verse in question is Q.13:17: "He sends down water from the skies, and the channels flow, each according to its measure..." The channels, for the imām, are Khurāsān's, or mean Khurāsān, and the water flowing in them the people of Khurāsān (*rijāl Khurāsān*), "who are more firm — in their allegiance to us — than pieces of iron".[101] The imām then goes on to offer a characterization of the religious affiliations of people of the different regions.[102]

Much of the same objections as have been made with reference to the first example above apply here as well. This tradition, which has the explicit purpose to extol the people of Khurāsān and to contrast them with people of other regions, seems likely to have been brought into being to affirm, or celebrate, the link of the 'Abbāsids with Khurāsān, and is unlikely to have existed before the final phases of the movement which brought the 'Abbāsids to power.

Our third example relates to the use of Qur'ānic materials in the course of the aforementioned disputations between the partisans of the 'Abbāsid movement and supporters of the Umayyad camp. Given the literary character of our sources, and the evidence for such disputations comes for the most part from *one* source — the *Akhbār al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya* — there is no way of being certain that the disputations in question did in fact take place. Disputations between opponents of different theological and other viewpoints did certainly take place. That they did not occur the way they are said to have, with the 'Abbāsids invariably defeating their opponents, is very likely, however.[103] In their present form, they are most probably expressive of the way the new dynasty wished to have its revolutionary past remembered and to have its past and/or present ideological positions successfully defended. It is also possible that such disputations are essentially a *literary device*, which serves to effectively articulate various ideological positions or propositions by creating an imaginary dialectical situation.[104]

Arguing with imaginary, or imagined, interlocutors in defending one's own position and attacking that of an actual or presumed opponent is typical of works of *kalām* and not unusual in those of *fiqh*.[105] It can scarcely be denied that representatives of various viewpoints, schools and sects did "in reality" engage in disputations with each other. The point rather is that the *form* of such disputations is also a literary *genre*, and one which is not just encountered in works of theology and jurisprudence. In the earlier sections of a historical work such as the *Akhbār al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya* itself, the elaborate accounts of disputations between 'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās — the distinguished and very

learned progenitor of the 'Abbāsid household — and the caliph Mu'āwiya — the founder of the Umayyad dynasty — as well as between the former and several other prominent figures of early Islam are also, in all probability, fictitious.[106] These too seem essentially to be literary devices, serving to defend or attack particular positions which may *later* have seemed to the 'Abbāsids, or the *ahl al-Bayt* in *general*, as worthy of defence or attack. It is, at the very least, *possible*, therefore, that the disputations reported to have been carried on between the partisans and opponents of the 'Abbāsid movement are literary forms too, and conform to a time honoured literary tradition in being such. If that is the case, the references to the Qur'ān which figure in the course of such disputations would still remain of interest for showing how Qur'ānic materials were used to lend colour and significance to a point or a claim in *narratives* of the 'Abbāsid movement; they would not, however, tell us anything about the 'Abbāsid movement itself.

III

The disputations of 'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās with Mu'āwiya and others, on which the *Akhbār al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya* dwells at such length, are of interest not only as illustrations of the literary *genre* of disputation, but also for the prominence that the Qur'ān occupies in some of them. In view of the latter consideration, it is worth asking ourselves again, even at the cost of a digression, if such disputations can also tell us something about our immediate concern here, viz. the function of Qur'ānic texts in narratives of the 'Abbāsid revolution.

'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās is, of course, a major figure in early Islamic intellectual history, and appears to have been recognized, already in his lifetime, as an authority on religious matters in general and on the interpretation of the Qur'ān in particular. The *Akhbār* emphasizes his learning, and notes in particular the Prophet's prayer that God grant Ibn 'Abbās wisdom (*hikma*) and an ability to interpret the Qur'ān (*ta'wīl*).[107]

The question of how to interpret the Qurʾān, if at all, comes up in an interesting dispute which, according to the *Akhbār's* account, once took place between Muʿāwiya and Ibn ʿAbbās. A part of this account may be quoted here:

> [Muʿāwiya] said: 'We have written to the Anṣār commanding them to desist from recounting the virtues (*manāqib*) of ʿAlī and of the members of his family (*ahl baytihi*), and you too must so refrain.' [Ibn ʿAbbās] said: 'Are you then forbidding us to recite the Qurʾān?' [Muʿāwiya] said: 'No'. [Ibn ʿAbbās] said: 'So, are you forbidding us to interpret it (*taʾwīlihi*)?' [Muʿāwiya] said: 'Yes'. [Ibn ʿAbbās] said: 'So shall we recite it but not be asked what it means?' [Muʿāwiya] said: 'Those who do not interpret it the way you and members of your family do ought to be asked about [what it means].' [Ibn ʿAbbās] said: 'The Qurʾān has been revealed in my family (*ʿalā ahl baytī*), so how shall I ask the family of Abū Sufyān [Muʿāwiya's father] about it! O Muʿāwiya, do you stop us from worshipping Allāh according to what the Qurʾān says about what is allowed [by Allāh] and what forbidden? For if the community does not inquire, and find out, about such matters, it would be destroyed and divided.' [Muʿāwiya] said: 'Recite the Qurʾān and do interpret it, but do not narrate anything about what Allāh has revealed regarding you [the *ahl al-Bayt*]; everything else, you may narrate.[108]

Ibn ʿAbbās speaks here, of course, as representative of the Prophet's family — the *ahl al-Bayt* — and appears, in this context, to be emphasizing not his own extraordinary expertise in the Qurʾān but the right, and the special talent, of members of the Prophet's household (whoever they might be) to interpret it. Muʿāwiya's misgivings stem, in

this account, from his realization that the Qur'ān does indeed recognize the position of the *ahl al-Bayt*, so to allow the latter to expatiate on the verses in question would amount to undermining the ideological basis of his own authority.[109]

That Mu'āwiya would have conceded the justice of his opponent's view on the hollowness of his own legitimacy, and without much ado, as the foregoing account in the *Akhbār* would have it, is eminently unlikely. This tradition, like most others on disputations in the *Akhbār*, and including those which are placed in the milieu of the 'Abbāsid revolution, should rather be read as literary constructions of pro-'Abbāsid viewpoints in terms of the disputation *genre*. The foregoing passage is, however, more than an illustration of this *genre*, or of some version of 'Abbāsid (or Shī'ite) legitimism. It seems possible, too, to relate it with the use of Qur'ānic materials *during the 'Abbāsid revolution*. Two themes prominent in this passage are: (1) the *ahl al-Bayt's* superior understanding of the Qur'ān, and (2) the Qur'ān's recognition of their special position. In accounts of the 'Abbāsid movement, the use of Qur'ānic materials serves, besides emphasizing the *ahl al-Bayt's* preeminence in the community, to depict particular situations in terms of the sacred text, and to thereby recast their meaning and their significance. To do so obviously presupposes, and represents an implicit claim to, an *understanding* of what the Qur'ān means and stands for. More importantly, what our sources report on the use of the Qur'ān in the course of the 'Abbāsid movement can also be read as an effort to demonstrate that the Qur'ān is on the latter's side. In his altercation with Mu'āwiya, Ibn 'Abbās' claim is not much different. It may well be, therefore, that the use of the Qur'ān in the latter's disputations, on the one hand, and in various situations during the 'Abbāsid movement, on the other, are expressions of the same narrative strategy. That the ingredients of this narrative strategy include references to the Qur'ān hardly entails that it is only to the (later) narrative, and not to the historical actors themselves, that the invocation of the Qur'ān must be attributed. All that is being suggested here is that Qur'ānic materials

may have assisted in the construction of narratives of the 'Abbāsid revolution; and that some of the strategies which seem to be at work in the making of such narratives may be rather similar to those underlying the disputations of Ibn 'Abbās. Shared narrative strategies also give an overall unity to the chronicle as a whole. This last point will be taken up in the epilogue.

IV

A third set of historiographical problems stems from the fact that while all the major sources report the invocation of Qur'ānic materials, the use of the *same* materials is not uniformly attested in all of them.[110] This unevenness can, to a certain extent, be explained in terms of the marked differences in what these sources have, in general, to say about the 'Abbāsid revolution: none, for instance, can even remotely match the fullness of detail which the *Akhbār al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya* offers. It should be not very surprising, therefore, that the latter work should also be the richest in reporting allusions and references to the Qur'ān.

For instance, what al-Ṭabarī and the *Akhbār* respectively report as regards Abū Muslim's being sent to Khurāsān to lead the *da'wa* there does agree in essentials (viz. that it was the Imām Ibrāhīm who sent him there, that Abū Muslim brought with him a letter from the imām concerning his appointment, that the Khurāsānīs initially refused to accept him, and so forth), but the *Akhbār's* narrative is far richer and more "complete" than al-Ṭabarī's. The contents of the imām's letter to the Khurāsānīs are simply described thus in al-Ṭabarī's version: "I have given him [*scil*. Abū Muslim] my command, so listen to him and accept his words, for I have given him command over Khurāsān and whatever he may gain control over beyond it."[111] There is no indication from al-Ṭabarī that the letter may really have been longer than what is reported here or that this represents a selection or summary of its contents. The *Akhbār*, for its part, provides us with a more elaborate version.[112] Its

principal interest for our purposes is that it exhibits ample use of Qur'ānic materials (which, of course, are absent in al-Ṭabarī's version of this letter): two Qur'ānic verses (Q.6:45 and Q.24:55) are invoked, in addition to several other scriptural allusions.[113] Whether the *Akhbār's* version is a more complete text, while al-Ṭabarī's is only a part or precis of it, is not easy, nor really necessary, to decide here. Needless to say, the former's claim to authenticity does not become stronger simply because it looks like a more complete text; if anything, a fuller account is in fact rather more likely to represent historiographical reworking than a relatively bland statement such as al-Ṭabarī's. In any case, the fact that the *Akhbār's* narratives are more detailed than those of other historians can be taken as one explanation of why the former exhibits a more extensive use of materials from the Qur'ān.

As might be expected, however, variations and lapses in reports on the use of scriptural materials cannot always be satisfactorily accounted for in terms of differences in the historical scope of our sources. There are several occasions where Qur'ānic materials adduced in one source are lacking in another even though the latter source does treat of the event in question in a broadly similar manner. A major instance of such variations is the inaugural speech of Abu'l-'Abbās. We have already commented briefly on the Ṭabarī and Balādhurī versions of it.[114] The former does not specify his source for the text of this speech, beginning the report in question simply with an unhelpful "it is mentioned (*wa dhukira*) that...",[115] whereas al-Balādhurī cites one Abū Mas'ūd b. al-Qattāt al-Kūfī (from al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī?) as his source for the speech.[116] That al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī apparently draw on different sources may be deemed to account for the variants, including those regarding the use of Qur'ānic materials. Conversely, it is also possible that the Abu'l-'Abbās speech came to acquire its variants on the way to being incorporated into the compilations of which it is now a part, that is, (1) in the course of its transmission to the final compiler, and/or (2) at the hands of the final compiler. But this is speculation and the matter must remain undecided here.

V

Related to the problem of the absence, in one source, of some of the Qur'ānic material found in the same context in another source is the question of how the *same* scriptural text figures in somewhat *different* narratives in different sources. The following two examples, both pertaining to passages we have already discussed, should enable us to consider some aspects of this question.

The *Akhbār's* version of the historical tradition which embodies Q.2:259 ("Or [take] the similitude of one who passed by a hamlet...") has been analyzed earlier. That version may briefly be compared now with two others. Al-Dīnawarī quotes the said verse, but *only* to make the point (in the words of Muḥammad b. 'Alī) that "a hundred years never pass on a people (*umma*) without God restoring the rights of the rightful and counteracting the falsehood of the evil-doers (*mubṭilīn*)".[117] There is no mention of the man with the donkey in al-Dīnawarī's account, which may be taken to mean that it does not presuppose (as the *Akhbār*, for instance, clearly does) the latter part of Q.2:259 (which refers to the remains of the donkey). It follows that the messianic element — so important in the *Akhbār's* version — is mute, if it is not altogether absent, in al-Dīnawarī's version of our tradition. Al-Ya'qūbī's version has peculiarities of its own.[118] There, the "year of the donkey" *(sanat al-ḥimār)* is mentioned, apparently in full cognizance of its apocalyptic significance, though the proof-text (Q.2:259) is only alluded to rather than quoted in full. Interestingly, it is not Muḥammad b. 'Alī (as in other versions) but Abū Hāshim (the 'Alid who allegedly transferred the imāmate to the former, that is, to the 'Abbāsids) who is the speaker here; and the context which occasions the allusion to Q.2:259 is the "testament" of Abū Hāshim. Also part of this testament, as al-Ya'qūbī reports it, is the instruction to Muḥammad b. 'Alī to have the *da'wa* conducted by twelve *naqībs* — "for it was with them [*scil.* this number of *naqībs?*] that Allāh put the affairs of the Banū Isrā'īl in order ... and it was in following this [precedent] too that the Prophet [Muḥammad]

appointed twelve *naqībs* from among the Anṣār" — and by seventy others who would be subordinate to the *naqībs*. The absence of explicit *Qur'ānic* support in underlining the symbolic significance of the number twelve (and any precedent whatsoever for the number seventy) is striking here. The *Akhbār*, in reporting Bukayr b. Māhān's appointment of the *da'wa's* leaders in Khurāsān, does of course have him adduce scriptural proof, as we have already seen.

Though invoking the same scriptural passage (Q.2:259), the major themes of the tradition under discussion are ordered somewhat differently in the different versions; the manner in which the said Qur'ānic invocation relates to the narrative it is embedded in shows some variation too. This variation may be a function of the way the given scriptural text or allusion is interpreted in each version, and seems to depend too on which of the various possible implications of the scriptural text are made explicit in each case. That the scriptural invocation contributes to the way the historical tradition as a whole is reported quite as much as the structure of the latter may be taken to determine the way scripture itself is invoked here seems, in any case, to be quite likely.

Our second example concerns Q.35:42-43 ("They swore their strongest oaths by Allāh that if a warner came to them, they would follow his guidance better than any other of the peoples..."). The relation of this scriptural passage with the narratives which embody it in the *Ta'rīkh* of al-Ṭabarī and in the *Akhbār al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya* is more complex than in case of the previous example, and calls for a rather detailed analysis of the relevant portions of both narratives.

The source on which both al-Ṭabarī and the *Akhbār* seem to draw for the narratives in question is a certain Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb. Little is known about him, though al-Ṭabarī refers to him several times in his *Ta'rīkh*[119], and Elton Daniel believes that a substantial portion of the *Akhbār* also comes from him.[120] The difference between the two narratives is so substantial as to raise the question whether they are two *different* narratives about different sequences of events (though set in the same overall context) or are only two versions of an "original" narrative. Both

are attributed to Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb and both feature Q.35:42-43. Now even
if it is argued that the two are in fact different narratives, or different
parts of a narrative, from the same source (Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb), one would
still have to account for the appearance of the same Qur'ānic text in
both. As for the differences between the two narratives, a schematic
outline of the contents of each should indicate these. First, Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb
as in al-Ṭabarī:[121]

1.   Abū Muslim returns from Qūmis to the region of Marv (instead
     of going in person to visit the imām, as originally planned).
2.   He sends his emissaries to various parts of Khurāsān in
     preparation for bringing the hitherto clandestine movement out
     into the open.
3.   He establishes himself in the village of Sulaymān b. Kathīr, a
     veteran leader of the *da'wa*.
4.   On 25 Ramaḍān, 129, the flags sent by the imām are unfurled
     while Abū Muslim is reciting Q.22:39, black garments are worn,
     fires are lit at night, and the revolution begins.
5.   The *du'āt* and the supporters of the movement begin pouring in.
6.   On the occasion of the 'Īd, Sulaymān b. Kathīr leads the prayers;
     the prayer ritual, as performed on this occasion, differs in certain
     respects from the Umayyad practice.
7.   Abū Muslim formerly used to address Naṣr b. Sayyār, the
     Umayyad governor, as *"amīr"*; in writing to Naṣr after the open
     declaration of the *da'wa*, Abū Muslim alters the protocol and (as
     a mark of his independence) begins the letter with a reference to
     himself (*bada'a bi-nafsihi*) rather than with the name of Naṣr. It
     is in this letter that Abū Muslim quotes Q.35:42-43.
8.   Naṣr is perturbed by this letter.
9.   (Now that the movement has become an open revolt), Abū
     Muslim orders various measures of a military significance in
     anticipation of armed struggle with Umayyad authorities.

10. A military engagement at a village named Ālīn between some of
     the troops of Abū Muslim and those of Naṣr — the latter
     commanded by Yazīd, a *mawlā* of Naṣr.

11. Naṣr's men defeated; the *mawlā* Yazīd is among those who are
     captured.

12. Yazīd is treated kindly. When his wounds are healed, he is
     invited to stay on in the revolutionary camp; but he is also given
     the choice to return provided he does not again fight these
     revolutionaries and promises not to tell lies about them.

13. Yazīd does return, but as both Abū Muslim and Naṣr know, he
     is now a changed man, and has only good things to say about the
     revolutionaries and their religiosity.

14. This was the very first battle fought between the supporters of
     the movement and the Umayyads.

The portion of the *Akhbār al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya* which may
come from Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb is, as Daniel has observed, largely in the form
of an extensive, continuous and coherent narrative. The principal
contents of that part of this narrative in which the quotation of Q.35:42-
43 is embedded and which can be compared with the foregoing text in
al-Ṭabarī may now be summarized as follows.[122] (The immediate context
of what follows is the effort of Abū Muslim, having already brought the
'Abbāsid movement out into the open, to find allies in the forthcoming
struggle against Umayyad authorities. He even tried, or pretended, to
woo Naṣr himself, though he was far more successful with 'Alī al-
Kirmānī, the leader of the "Yemenite" tribal faction in Khurāsān. Naṣr
meanwhile was busy trying to forge an alliance of his own against Abū
Muslim with the Khārijite rebel Shaybān.[123])

1.   Abū Muslim sends an emissary to Naṣr, promising to recognize
     the latter as amīr if he were to dissociate himself from (the
     Umayyad caliph) Marwān II and join the *da'wa*.

2. Naṣr replies that he would accept Abū Muslim's invitation if he is convinced of his sincerity.

3. Abū Muslim meanwhile tries to win 'Alī al-Kirmānī over to his cause: besides much flattery, and while playing upon 'Alī's animosity towards Naṣr, Abū Muslim promises to recognize 'Alī as amīr should he join Abū Muslim's cause.

4. 'Alī's reaction is enthusiastic.

5. Yet Abū Muslim continues trying to seduce Naṣr with promises of recognizing him as amīr.

6. Naṣr invites Abū Muslim to prove his sincerity by coming to join him (*scil.* Naṣr) and dispersing his own troops. Naṣr's letter has a threatening tone.

7. One of Naṣr's confidants advises him to be more tactful with Abū Muslim, for he has already acquired much strength, and to feign agreement with him (*a'tihi al-ridā mā lam yuḥrijka*).

8. Naṣr then writes another letter, in which he warns Abū Muslim — this time more mildly — of the approaching military succour to him from the caliph and the fickleness of Abū Muslim's own followers, and promises Abū Muslim compassion should he come and join him.

9. Abū Muslim gives a defiant answer, which greatly perturbs Naṣr.

10. Abū Muslim formerly used to feed Naṣr's vanity with the protocol of beginning his letters to Naṣr with the latter's name. After 'Alī al-Kirmānī has made common cause with him, Abū Muslim again writes to Naṣr, but this time begins (the letter) with himself. In this letter, he warns Naṣr and quotes Q.35:42-43 to illustrate his point.

11. Naṣr is much perturbed and warns Abū Muslim again of the fickleness of some of his supporters. Abū Muslim remains defiant.

This outline of the two passages — al-Ṭabarī's and the *Akhbār's* — should have indicated their differences. A detailed commentary is unnecessary, though two points seem worth making. First, it is clear that the given account in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* is concerned with a far more extensive sequence of events than is the *Akhbār's*. But it is not only the *scope* of the two narratives which is different. The *events* which the two narratives describe are also different; consequently, it is not really possible to view the *Akhbār's* narrative as simply an enlarged version of a part of al-Ṭabarī's condensed narrative. That they are two discrete narratives from the same source — Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb — about *different* aspects of the 'Abbāsid revolution is also unlikely: some of the contents of the two do overlap, after all, most conspicuously the letter in which Abū Muslim invoked Q.35:42-43.

Second, if the contents of the two narratives are recognizably different, it is scarcely surprising that the context in which the said letter of Abū Muslim is introduced in each case is different too. This letter is not incongruent in either context. In both narratives it comes as an announcement to Naṣr of the challenge the revolutionary movement poses to him; and in both it only comes after Abū Muslim is shown to have become sufficiently confident of his position and power. Yet, this letter is much better integrated in the narrative structure of the *Akhbār* than it is in al-Ṭabarī's. One of the main claims this letter has to significance is that it is supposed to have marked the *first* occasion when Abū Muslim did not address Naṣr as "amīr". Now, the passages which, in the *Akhbār*, immediately precede this letter are largely concerned with Abū Muslim's offers and promises of the amīrate to both Naṣr and 'Alī al-Kirmānī. These preceding passages therefore provide a more intimate and — in terms of narrative structure — a more compelling context for Abū Muslim's eventual refusal to acknowledge Naṣr's amīrate than anything in al-Ṭabarī's narrative. Unlike al-Ṭabarī's version, the *Akhbār's* account also expressly links the writing of this letter with the assurance to Abū Muslim that 'Alī al-Kirmānī — the other major actor in the Khurāsānī drama — was to support him against Naṣr. Finally, if what the *Akhbār*

attributes here to Naṣr is taken seriously — though there seems little reason to do so — the reference to Q.35:42-43 in Abū Muslim's letter may be deemed to acquire a new meaning. In that case, this text could arguably be taken to apply to Naṣr himself, inasmuch as he had earlier promised to follow the truth but reneged when invited to join it. That Naṣr did in some way flirt with the 'Abbāsid *da'wa* is unlikely, unless it be that such was a ruse on his part or, conversely, a consequence of his problems with the Umayyad caliph, Marwān II, and especially with the governor of Iraq, Yazīd b. 'Umar b. Hubayra.[124] Whether or not Naṣr showed any interest in the prospects of joining the rebels, however, the insinuation of Abū Muslim (or of 'Abbāsid historiography) that he did could certainly contribute towards morally vindicating the stance of the revolutionaries. So far as the *Akhbār's* narrative goes, this insinuation would also serve, of course, to make the invocation and meaning of Q.35:42-43 even more integral to the given context.

If Abū Muslim's letter seems to fit the context rather better in the *Akhbār's* account than it does in al-Ṭabarī's, it scarcely follows that the former has a greater likelihood of being the "true" account.[125] It might only be that the former is a more artfully contrived narrative than the latter. If both are indeed based on some "original" account of Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb, then we have an instructive illustration here of the extent to which the processes of transmission and of incorporation into various compilations might shape and transform a given text.[126] (For instance, al-Ṭabarī does not corroborate the *Akhbār* on Naṣr's insinuating that he was open to the overtures of the 'Abbāsid *da'wa*.) It should, in the end, be stressed, however, that while the two accounts discussed here must be viewed and interpreted as *narrative structures* (and therefore as literary artifacts), the factual value of everything they report is not thereby necessarily rendered untenable. Abū Muslim might well have written the said letter to Naṣr and *may* have invoked the said verses of the Qur'ān; and this event might have occurred in the context that the *Akhbār* reports, or the context that al-Ṭabarī furnishes, or perhaps in some other context.[127] The effort to depict that context is a later and *literary*

endeavour. How significantly the various depictions differ from what they purport to depict is very hard, if not altogether impossible, to decide.

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FOUR

Epilogue

I

Much of the work on the 'Abbāsid revolution so far has concentrated on one or both of the following purposes: to write a history of the revolution, or of some aspects of it;[128] and/or to explore the themes and problems of the historiography of the revolution.[129] The latter effort usually takes the form of explorations into the tendencies which may be discernible in the traditions pertaining to the 'Abbāsid revolution. To try to isolate such tendencies, to determine their meaning with some precision, and to assess their significance are all aspects of a necessary exercise, which can tell us a great deal about the character of 'Abbāsid historiography and the processes which went into its making. But historiographical work on this important and difficult subject also requires taking a further step: it requires that we go beyond trying to determine what particular traditions — and/or the narratives they are embedded in — "mean", and to inquire into how, and with what elements, our historical narratives themselves are constructed, how they function *as narratives*,[130] and what the *form* of such narratives can tell us about the historical content they purport to embody.[131]

These questions have not been systematically treated in this study. Some effort has, nevertheless, been made here to interpret

traditions not merely as discrete units, but also as part of, and as shaped by, the narratives into which they are structured. Some further points seem worth making in this regard.

What a narrative structure does to a sequence of events is, as Hayden White says, to make it a "story"; as such, it "endows events ... with a significance that they do not possess as a mere sequence..."[132] To say, however, that a historical narrative serves to make a "story" out of a mere sequence certainly does not necessitate that the *content* of that narrative cannot, or must cease to be factual. The implication is, rather, that it is in principle possible to shape more than one narrative out of the same sequence of events.[133] In the work of many an early Islamic historian, but most characteristically in the *Ta'rīkh* of al-Tabarī, the multiple accounts of the same event(s) from different sources, or more or less significant variants of one account, should suffice as an illustration of how a given set of events can call forth distinct narratives. In studying the use of Qur'ānic materials in our sources, it therefore becomes necessary to ask not only how the verses in question may have been interpreted in a given historical situation, but also how they function in a given narrative. And ultimately, we must also decide, of course, if, in at least some instances, the use of such material might *only* have served the purpose of a narrator in the making of his narrative. The question of how the use of materials from the Qur'ān may have helped in the narrativization of a particular sequence of events — that is, in the making of a "story" — can only be posed but not adequately answered here. It clearly is a question worth pursuing, however, and not only for materials pertaining to the 'Abbāsid revolution.[134]

II

The structure of a narrative gives coherence and meaning to the historical traditions which comprise it. A historical work — for instance, a chronicle — likewise imposes a unity and some kind of a structure on the

narratives which constitute it. The same logic that requires that a given narrative be viewed as more than a sum of its constituent parts necessitates a similar way of treating larger historical works as well. That historians of early Islam structured their works to give some kind of a unity to the narratives which comprised those works is not in question; what needs demonstration is *how* these works were structured and how such structures affect the narratives they embody. These questions would probably have to be answered separately for *each* historical work. All that can be attempted here is a brief consideration of one work of particular importance for this study, the *Akhbār al-Dawla al-ʿAbbāsiyya*.

That the *Akhbār* exhibits a certain unity of purpose is recognized by almost all scholars who have seriously studied it. But this unity has most often been thought of in terms of the *Akhbār's* profoundly pro-ʿAbbāsid character (though it is far from clear where in ʿAbbāsid history such pro-ʿAbbāsid viewpoints as the *Akhbār* presents ought to be situated or contextualized). What has been rather less often recognized is that the *Akhbār* displays certain narrative strategies which too, no less than the pro-ʿAbbāsid purposes and contents of the work, give it a quite remarkable structural unity. This unity can be observed at several levels. It may, for instance, be seen at the level of *narrative devices*, one of the most conspicuous of which is that of disputation. We have already commented on its significance, and need not pursue it further. At another level, the problem of authority — a pervasive concern with defining and locating legitimate authority — may be thought to give an overall unity to the structure of this work. A concern with some form of authority is, of course, not peculiar to this work; in the opinion of Hayden White, it is presupposed by *all* narrative. He says:

> We cannot but be struck by the frequency with which narrativity, whether of the fictional or the factual sort, presupposes the existence of a legal system against or on behalf of which the typical agents of a narrative account militate. And this raises the suspicion that narrative in

> general, from the folktale to the novel, from the annals
> to the fully realized "history", has to do with the topics
> of law, legality, legitimacy, or, more generally,
> *authority*.... The more historically self-conscious the
> writer of any form of historiography, the more the
> question of the social system and the law which sustains
> it, the authority of this law and its justification, and
> threats to the law occupy his attention.[135]

We shall not try to decide here whether the problem of authority is indeed so central to *all* narrative as Hayden White believes it is. All that need be remarked for now is that not only does the problem of authority come up in a variety of important ways in the *Akhbār*,[136] it is in fact integral to the *organization* of the work as a whole. The central theme of the disputations between Mu'āwiya and Ibn 'Abbās (no less than those between the latter and several other prominent figures of early Islam) is the question of — and the articulation of rival claims to — legitimate authority; the alleged transfer of leadership from the 'Alid Abū Hāshim to the 'Abbāsids, which occupies so prominent a place in the *Akhbār*, likewise bears on questions of authority; and the 'Abbāsid movement itself, which the *Akhbār* seeks so painstakingly to document, is nothing if not the story of the substitution of a legitimate for a usurpative authority. Then there is the putative invocation of Qur'ānic materials on the part of various people involved in the 'Abbāsid revolution: whether the purpose was to lend force and conviction to a certain idea, or to endow an event with far wider significance than its *local* context merited, or to appeal to the religious sensibilities of the audience, or only to construct a particular narrative, there can be little doubt that the use of the Qur'ānic materials serves to align the 'Abbāsid cause to an authority that surpasses all others, an authority that all parties to the conflict recognized as supreme — the authority of the very word of God.

The *Akhbār's* quotations from the Qur'ān constitute yet another aspect of the overall unity of this historical work. The significance of the scriptural material here derives not only from what particular Qur'ānic quotations "mean" in particular contexts, or from the fact that we have here a fairly large number of such quotations, but also from the way these quotations are spread out: they are sufficiently scattered, in fact, to encompass a large portion of this work. As seen in chapter II, one can come close to recounting the history of the 'Abbāsid revolution exclusively *in terms of* this Qur'ānic material; and, as noted already, the use of the Qur'ān in narratives of the 'Abbāsid revolution is, in all probability, also linked to narratives describing Ibn 'Abbās' disputations with Mu'āwiya. That is, the use of verses from the Qur'ān may be deemed to be among the ways in which this historical work acquires an overall unity of structure.

In short, the *Akhbār* is not simply a loosely structured collection of narratives with a distinctly pro-'Abbāsid agenda, but a work whose unity is vouched for by several different narrative strategies and can be observed at several different levels.[137] Needless to say, it is the overall structure of the work which may be supposed to condition individual narratives quite as much as the latter's own structures condition the traditions they comprise.

III

In an important essay published a few years ago, R. Stephen Humphreys has proposed that the fundamental paradigm governing the narrative structures of early Islamic historiography derives from the Qur'ān.[138] It seems appropriate to conclude this study, which has been concerned with scriptural texts and narrative structures, with some comments on this interesting hypothesis. "[T]he events constituting the core of Islamic history are presented", Humphreys says, "in a specifically religious framework.... Predictably but nonetheless significantly, statements of the

religious issues at stake are grounded in citations from or unmistakable allusions to the Qur'ān. It is the sacred text that seems to provide the definitive criterion for understanding and judging these events."[139] This criterion he sees as the "paradigm" (or "myth", as he also terms it) of "Covenant, Betrayal, and Redemption", a paradigm which is deducible from the Qur'ān, is applicable to early Islamic history, and is shared by some of the major historians of early Islam. Humphreys seems to regard al-Ṭabarī's treatment (more than that of other historians) of the murder of the caliph 'Uthmān, and especially a letter this caliph is supposed to have written in defending himself against his detractors, as the *locus classicus* of the said paradigm. Accordingly, we shall also limit our comments to al-Ṭabarī.

Humphreys' view has certain strengths. For example, the theme of a primordial human covenant with Allāh and warnings against its betrayal, on the one hand, and, on the other, the many questions raised by such tragedies as the first civil war in Islam (656-661) etc., do suggest a "dialectic of scripture and historical experience".[140] The covenant-betrayal-redemption paradigm is an attractive way of visualising how early Islamic historians may have seen their past, present and future. The narrative structures of the major early historical works *do not* seem, however, to exhibit or exemplify this paradigm. The example Humphreys adduces in support — the historiographical treatment of the murder of caliph 'Uthmān — would hardly suffice to sustain the paradigm: not only is it too restricted in scope for a generalization of this magnitude, it is also of rather uncertain value as illustration of the paradigm Humphreys proposes. Neither this particular illustration, nor al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* as a whole, indicates, for instance, how redemption would ultimately be achieved; consequently the question Humphreys himself poses to al-Ṭabarī's great work — "[h]ow and by whom would redemption come?"[141] — remains ultimately (and symptomatically) unanswered. If redemption comes through the rectitude of the community,[142] then, on the standard Sunnī view, the community has, in general, *always* been righteous and must necessarily remain such. If, on

the other hand, it did somehow fall into error, there seems little indication, in al-Ṭabarī's great historical work at least, of how the community now ought to redeem itself.

Humphreys' paradigm does not quite seem to fit, much less to make better sense of, al-Ṭabarī's treatment of Islamic history. How this paradigm encompasses *pre-Islamic* history, which (as Humphreys is aware) constitutes a very considerable part of al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*, as it does of several other "universal" histories, is another question. Islam is certainly presented by Muslim historians "as a radically new phase in world history, supplanting what had previously existed."[143] Yet the fact that pre-Islamic history gets extensive coverage at the hands of the major chroniclers suggests that this history is not only relevant but somehow integral to their interpretive frameworks: the significance of Islam's putative break with the past, for instance, cannot be appreciated without some sense of the historical continuity with which it broke. That the historiographical (or, for that matter, the theological) tradition does claim a break with the past is itself anything but self-evident, however: Islam presents itself, after all, as the culmination of the earlier religious dispensations, and it is tempting to see the early historians' presentation of pre-Islamic history as, above all, a *"preparatio prophetica"*.[144] The paradigm of covenant-betrayal-redemption could conceivably be taken to illustrate the *Qur'ānic* view of history, a view which — as Humphreys suggests — is deducible from what the Qur'ān has to say about the earlier Prophets and the fortunes of their communities;[145] but it is anything but clear if this Qur'ānic view of history (if it is indeed such) is *also* the paradigm at work in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* and in the works of other early Islamic historians.

Whether or not the Qur'ān defines the narrative structure of early Islamic historiography, there is no denying that materials drawn from the Qur'ān can and do play a very considerable role in historical narratives. The early Islamic historians drew on the Qur'ān in a variety of ways and, it seems, for several different reasons. As Humphreys has suggested, scriptural citations can enable the historians to implicitly judge

the events they are describing. Qur'ānic quotations may also serve, as briefly indicated in this study, to fashion and shape particular narratives. To say so is, again, not to assert that the people these narratives are concerned with, the protagonists of their stories, could not themselves have used scriptural passages in the course of their activities and while variously expressing themselves. What is being suggested is only that the use of scriptural texts *also* seems to have assisted in the literary and narrative construction of the ʿAbbāsid revolution, and that sometimes, the description of an event or the form of a narrative appears to be inseparable from the Qur'ānic texts it embodies. How much of the Qur'ānic materials which our sources present as part of the revolution's religious discourse were invoked by those actually involved in that revolution, and how much come from the historiography of that event, remains, in the end, very hard to decide. Nevertheless, it is, perhaps, something of a consolation that the function of these Qur'ānic texts in narratives of the ʿAbbāsid revolution is of no less (and possibly, of greater) interest than is the question of their provenance in these narratives.

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Notes

1. For some of the things "discourse" means in literary theory, see *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, ed. Roger Fowler (London: Routledge, 1973 [repr. 1990]), s.v. "Discourse". My use of the term should not be understood to have the precise connotations it does in the work of Michel Foucault (or of others who have written on it).

2. The 'Abbāsid revolution has been much discussed in modern scholarship. The following studies (listed here roughly from the more recent backwards) are noteworthy: Moshe Sharon, *Black Banners from the East: The Establishment of the 'Abbāsid State — Incubation of a Revolt* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1983); idem, *Revolt: The Social and Military Aspects of the 'Abbāsid Revolution* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1990); Jacob Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory: Abbasid Apologetics and the Art of Historical Writing* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1986); idem, "The 'Abbasid Dawla: An Essay on the Concept of Revolution in Early Islam", in F. M. Clover and R. Stephen Humphreys, *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 247-270; 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dūrī, "al-Fikra al-Mahdiyya bayna'l-Da'wa al-'Abbāsiyya wa'l-'Abbāsī al-Awwal", in W. al-Qāḍī, ed., *Studia Arabica et Islamica: Festschrift for Iḥsān 'Abbās* (Beirut: The American University of Beirut, 1981), pp. 123-32; Elton Daniel, *The Political and Social History of Khurasan under Abbasid Rule, 747-820* (Minneapolis and Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1979); Tilman Nagel, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehung des abbasidischen Kalifates* (Bonn: Selbstverlag des orientalischen Seminar der Universität, 1972); Fārūq 'Umar, *Ṭabī'at al-Da'wa al-'Abbāsiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Irshād, 1970); M. A. Shaban, *The 'Abbāsid Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Claude Cahen, "Points du vue sur la 'Revolution abbaside'", *Revue Historique* (1963), pp. 295-338; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition (Leiden: E. J. Brill,

1960-) [hereafter *EI*(2)], s.v. "'Abbāsids" (B. Lewis); D. C. Dennett, "Marwān ibn Muḥammad: The Passing of the Umayyad Caliphate", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1939; Julius Wellhausen, *Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz*, tr. M. G. Weir, *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1927); G. van Vloten, *Recherches sur la domination arabe, le chiitisme, et les croyances messianiques sous le khalifat des Omayades* (Amsterdam: J. Muller, 1894).

For an excellent survey of medieval and modern scholarship on the 'Abbāsid revolution, see R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 104-27.

3.   On some of these transformations, see Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Jacob Lassner, *The Shaping of Abbasid Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

4.   Cf. I. Blay-Abramski, "From Damascus to Baghdad: The 'Abbāsid Administrative System as a Product of the Umayyad Heritage (41/661 - 320/932)", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1982.

5.   While most major "universal" historians of the classical and medieval Islamic periods have dealt with the 'Abbāsid revolution, modern scholarship was set on a new footing with the discovery of a unique history of the 'Abbāsid household in the pre-revolution phase. This history, the *Akhbār al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya* (ed. 'A.-'A. al-Dūrī and A.-J. al-Muttalibī [Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī'a, 1971]), is an anonymous work which seems to have been compiled sometime in the 3rd/9th century. Its special importance lies not only in its being the most detailed reconstruction of the 'Abbāsid movement now available, but also in its being informed by a thoroughly pro-'Abbāsid — perhaps even by some version of an "official" 'Abbāsid — perspective. This historical source thus offers important possibilities for reconstructing the "actual" course of events; but, more importantly, it offers invaluable insights into how the 'Abbāsids themselves may have wanted to have the movement which brought them to power remembered by posterity. On the *Akhbār*, see Elton L. Daniel, "The Anonymous History of the Abbasid Family and its Place in Islamic Historiography", *International Journal of*

Middle East Studies, XIV (1982), pp. 419-34; Moshe Sharon, "The 'Abbasid Da'wa Re-examined on the Basis of the Discovery of a new Source", in Arabic and Islamic Studies, ed. J. Mansour (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1973), pp. xxi-xli. The most extensive historiographical study so far of the Akhbār, as well as of the traditions pertaining to the 'Abbāsid revolution in other historical sources, is Lassner, Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory. For a succinct classification and assessment of the other principal sources, see Stephen Humphreys, Islamic History, pp. 111ff.

6. For one typology of the "literary uses, and hence communal functions, of scripture" in early Islam, see John Wansbrough, The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 57ff. Wansbrough's proposed typology seems intended for the "sīra-maghāzī literature" (as he characterizes it), with which he is concerned in this book, though it remains unclear (to the present writer, at any rate) how exhaustive, or useful, that typology is for dealing with even that literature. For our concerns in this essay, its value is rather limited. See note 134, below.

7. J. Jomier, "Aspects of the Qur'ān Today", in Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period, ed. A. F. L. Beeston et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 260f.

8. For a pioneering account of the highly unusual position the Qur'ān occupies in the legal system of one of the most distinguished jurists of medieval Islam, see Wael B. Hallaq, "The Primacy of the Qur'ān in Shāṭibī's Legal Theory", in Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams, eds. Wael B. Hallaq and Donald P. Little (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), pp. 69-90; reprinted as article nr. XI in Wael B. Hallaq, Law and Legal Theory in Classical and Medieval Islam (London: Variorum, 1995).

9. This position, insofar as it pertains to medieval Islamic legal thought, is forcefully argued in the various studies collected in Hallaq, Law and Legal Theory in Classical and Medieval Islam.

10.   Cf. R. Stephen Humphreys, "Qur'anic Myth and Narrative Structure in Early Islamic Historiography", in Clover and Humphreys, *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, pp. 271-290, especially p. 275.

11.   The following observations on the Dome of the Rock are all based on Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 48-67.

12.   These verses appear at different places in the Dome of the Rock. It has been found convenient to list them here according to the sequence of chapters in the Qur'ān. This sequence does not, however, reflect the way in which these verses figure in the Dome of the Rock.

13.   Ibrahim Jomaih's dissertation, "The Use of the Qur'an in Political Argument: A Study of Early Islamic Parties (35 - 86 A.H./656 - 706 A.D.)", U.C.L.A. Ph.D., 1988, was unfortunately not available to the present writer.

14.   R. Stephen Humphreys, "Qur'anic Myth and Narrative Structure in Early Islamic Historiography", in Clover and Humphreys, *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, pp. 271-290; the quotation is from p. 275. Also cf. p. 276: "It is important to understand that the Qur'anic citations in 'Uthmān's letter are no mere ornament or illustration. They provide the logic and vocabulary — the conceptual apparatus — through which he perceives, interprets, and presents the crisis confronting the community. They are the very essence of his argument." For a translation of the text of this letter, see ibid., pp. 283-87.

15.   Stephen Humphreys, "Qur'anic Myth and Narrative Structure", pp. 275 and 278ff.

16.   Cf. Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879-1901), I, pp. 3330ff., 3352; for detailed references and a discussion, see Martin Hinds, "The Ṣiffīn Arbitration Agreement", *Journal of Semitic Studies*, XVII (1972), pp. 93ff.

17.   Hinds, "Ṣiffīn Arbitration Agreement", p. 96.

18. See al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, pp. 3351ff.; W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), pp. 13ff.; G. R. Hawting, "The Significance of the Slogan *lā ḥukma illā l'illāh...*", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XLI (1978). On Khārijī thought in general, see E. A. Salem, *Political Thought and Institutions of the Khawārij* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1955); also cf. Michael G. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 468ff.

19. Cf. Watt, *Formative Period*, pp. 14f.; for some examples, see al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, p. 3364, II, pp. 1623, 2010, 2014, etc. Also cf. al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-Tiwāl*, ed. V. Guirgass (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1888), p. 218 *ad* Albrecht Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*, 2nd edn. in collaboration with Lawrence I. Conrad, tr. Michael Bonner (Princeton, The Darwin Press, 1994), p. 9.

20. See al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, pp. 3352, 3361ff.; *Akhbār*, pp. 40f.

21. Appealing to "*Kitāb Allāh wa Sunnat Nabiyyih*" was a fairly standard feature of most revolts in early Islam: see Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 59ff.

22. See al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, pp. 1086, 1094, etc. On this revolt, see Redwan Sayed, *Die Revolte des Ibn al-Aš'ath und die Koranleser. Ein Beitrag zur Religions- und Sozialgeschichte der frühen Umayyadenzeit* (Freiburg: Klaus Schwarz, 1977).

23. Cf. Sayed, *Die Revolte*, especially pp. 277ff.

24. Cf. Martin Hinds, "Kufan Political Alignments and their background in the mid-seventh century A.D.", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, II (1971), pp. 358f.

25. See M. A. Shaban, *Islamic History A.D. 600-750 (A.H. 132): A New Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 23, 51 and n. 1; G. H. A. Juynboll, "The Qurrā' in Early Islamic

History", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, XVI (1973), pp. 113-129.

26.   Cf. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, pp. 435f.

27.   Cf., in particular, al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, p. 2920 (*ad* Mu'āwiya's letter to the caliph 'Uthmān concerning some of the *qurra'*. Also cf. Hinds, "Kufan Political Alignments", p. 359; Juynboll, "The Qurrā'", p. 115.

28.   See Tayeb El-Hibri, "Coinage Reform under the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Ma'mūn", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, XXXVI (1993), pp. 64f.

29.   Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 932; translation as in M. Fishbein, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. XXXI: *The War Between Brothers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 204 (with minor modifications).

30.   Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 1009; cf. Ira M. Lapidus, "The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of Early Islamic Society", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, VI (1975), pp. 372ff. Note, however, that the reference to the *mushaf* being worn, or "hung" in the neck does not necessarily have to refer to the *complete* text of the Qur'ān; it could equally mean a fragment of it. Cf. Hinds, "Siffin Arbitration Agreement", pp. 95f. Hinds does not, however, mention the case of Sahl b. Salāma.

31.   Cf. Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1982), especially pp. 105ff.; Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt against the Modern Age* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1990), pp. 105ff., 214f.

32.   For some instances, see *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, translated and annotated by Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), pp. 226f., 265, and index, s.v. "Qur'an"; *Selected Messages and Speeches of Imam Khomeini* (Tehran: The Ministry of National Guidance, n.d.), pp. 1, 23ff., 27, 40, 82, etc.; *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran: The Hamdami Publishers, n.d.), preamble (pp. 5, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17),

art. 7 (p. 23), art. 8 (p. 23), art. 11 (p. 24), art. 14 (p. 26), art. 151 (p. 69), etc. It is not without interest to note that some of the Qur'ānic verses invoked by the Iranian revolutionaries were already part of the religious discourse of the 'Abbāsid revolution.

33. The modernity of "fundamentalist" movements has been stressed by many observers of contemporary Islam. See, for instance, Lawrence, *Defenders of God*; Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam* (London: Routledge, 1991); Youssef M. Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990).

34. Ellis Goldberg, "Smashing Idols and the State: The Protestant Ethic and Egyptian Sunni Radicalism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XXXIII (1991), pp. 3-35, especially p. 13.

35. For a preliminary (and rather unsatisfactory) effort to draw attention to the use of Qur'ānic materials in the 'Abbāsid revolution, cf. my "Some Considerations on References to the Qur'ān during the 'Abbāsid Movement", *Islamic Studies*, vol. XXIX (1990), pp. 29-41.

36. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, p. 1989.

37. Ibid., II, p. 5. Cf. Sharon, *Revolt*, p. 201.

38. Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 66, and generally, pp. 59ff.

39. Cf. *EI*(2), s.vv. "'Abbāsids" (B. Lewis), "Kaysāniyya" (W. Madelung), "Khidāsh" (M. Sharon); Wadād al-Qāḍī, *al-Kaysāniyya fī'l-Ta'rīkh wa'l-Adab* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1974). Also see Ibn al-Muqaffa', "Risāla fī'l-Ṣaḥāba", in M. Kurd 'Alī, *Rasā'il al-Bulaghā'* (Cairo, 1954), p. 120.

40. See *EI*(2), s.v. "Khidāsh" (M. Sharon); Sharon, *Black Banners*, pp. 165ff. and passim.

41. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, p. 1992; *Akhbār*, p. 292. The 'Abbāsid general Qaḥṭaba b. Shabīb was also called a *sāḥir* by the people of Nihāwand, for all that he tried to convince them of his sincerity even in Qur'ānic diction: "And who is better in speech than him who prayeth unto his

Lord and doeth right, and saith: Lo! I am of those who surrender (unto Him)." (Q.41:33). See *Akhbār*, p. 352.

42.   On the apparently widespread accusations that the partisans and followers of the movement were religiously suspect, cf. *Akhbār*, pp. 282, 290, 292, etc. Also cf. Sharon, *Revolt*, pp. 63ff.

43.   Cf. Wilferd Madelung, "The Early Murji'a in Khurasan and Transoxiana and the Spread of Ḥanafism", *Der Islam*, XLIX (1982), pp. 35f.

44.   Cf. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, pp. 1958f.

45.   Literally: "people/members of the House/Household". The household referred, in the standard Muslim understanding, to the family of the Prophet Muḥammad. The 'Abbāsids claimed — besides the 'Alids — to be members of the "family of the Prophet".
        On the significance of the passing of a hundred years, and a detailed examination of the historical tradition (and the Qur'ānic verse) under discussion, see Nagel, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehung des abbasidischen Kalifates*, pp. 55-63. Also see Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory*, pp. 65ff.

46.   *Akhbār*, p. 193; al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, pp. 334f. The translation of the Qur'ānic passages quoted in this essay is principally based on 'Abdallāh Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Holy Qur'ān: Text, Translation and Commentary*, new revised edition (Brentwood, Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1989). Where appropriate, Yūsuf 'Alī's translation has been modified, usually in the light of, or in being collated with or partly substituted by, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall's *Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (London, 1930; numerous subsequent editions). Divergences from Yūsuf 'Alī's renderings will *not* be indicated in the notes.

47.   That such justification, against the 'Alids, is central to the concerns of early 'Abbāsid historiography is argued at length by Jacob Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory*. Also cf. Sharon, *Revolt*, p. 82.

48.   Note that the Imāmī Shī'a too explained their relatively quietist attitudes during the Umayyad period in terms of determinism: see E. Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī Shī'ī Interpretations of Umayyad History", in G. H. A. Juynboll, ed., *Studies on the First Century of Islamic History* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1982), especially pp. 152, 159.

49.   Sharon (*Revolt*, pp. 69f.) has this to say about the two flags: "... the banner and the flag had symbolic names — the one was called 'the shadow' (*az-ẓill*) and the other was called 'the cloud'. The tradition assures us that these names meant that 'just as the cloud covers the earth, so would also the Da'wah of Banū al-'Abbās', and the meaning of the shadow is that just as the earth cannot be devoid of shadows it cannot be devoid of the 'Abbāsid presence. This tradition should not be taken at face value. It actually represents the official 'Abbāsid court history which endeavoured to surround the 'Abbāsid rule with an apocalyptic aura and present the 'Abbāsid revolution as the final salvation." Sharon's strictures are of uncertain value. It is indeed possible that the meaning which the two flags are *reported by our sources* to have had may represent later historiographical reworking. There is little reason to doubt, however, that symbolism played an important role in the course of the 'Abbāsid movement (as it did in several other episodes of early Islamic history). The historicity of these flags is unprovable, but if there is any historical basis to them, then it would probably be not unjustified to suppose that they had some symbolic significance too. The same may be said of the significance of the colour black in the 'Abbāsid repertoire of symbols. Sharon's remarks on the latter (*Revolt*, pp. 83ff.) are equally wide of the mark. Also cf. his dismissal of a tradition (*ad* al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 5; Sharon, *Revolt*, p. 201) about an 'Abbāsid general fastening a *muṣḥaf* to his lance to call his opponents *ilā mā fī hādha'l-muṣḥaf*. Sharon regards the procedure reportedly adopted by Mu'āwiya's troops to call for arbitration at Ṣiffīn as the *Vorlage* of the tradition about the 'Abbāsid general. But as Martin Hinds has already noted ("Ṣiffīn Arbitration Agreement", p. 96), the battle of Ṣiffīn is *not* the first reported instance of thus displaying the Qur'ān on lances. Nor is it clear whether Sharon regards the incident at Ṣiffīn too as only a *topos* (cf. Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, p. 172). And what about traditions concerning the *wearing* of the *muṣḥaf* around one's neck? Are these too mere *topoi*? If not, the grounds on which traditions

about *muṣḥafs* on lances are to be regarded as such remain unclear.

50.   Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 1954; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi'l-Ta'rīkh*, ed. C.
        J. Tornberg (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1851-76; reprinted 1965), V, p. 358.

51.   See, for example, Ibn Abī Shayba, *Kitāb al-Muṣannaf* (Beirut: Dār al-
        Tāj, 1989), VII, p. 443 (tradition nr. 37092).

52.   The idea of Allāh's checking one set of people by means of another
        would seem to conform to, indeed be at the heart of, the notion of
        dawla in the sense of a political turn. This meaning of the term "dates
        from the accession to power of the 'Abbāsid caliphs in the mid-eighth
        century. The Umayyads had had their turn, and now it was the turn of
        the House of 'Abbās." Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*
        (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 36. Also cf. Lassner,
        "The 'Abbāsid *Dawla*", pp. 247-70, passim.
        It is somewhat curious therefore that this particular verse (Q.22:40) is
        not reported to have been invoked along with the previous one. A
        similar omission is again striking when Abu'l-'Abbās al-Saffāḥ is
        reported to have recited Q.2.249ff., but stopped short — at least the
        historical report about this occasion does — of the second part of verse
        251 (he is reported to have recited the first part). It is the second part
        which specifically speaks of Allāh's checking one set of people with
        another.

53.   *Akhbār*, pp. 269f.

54.   Also cf. the inaugural speech of 'Abu'l-'Abbās, the first 'Abbāsid
        caliph, where the claim that the 'Abbāsids — qua *ahl al-Bayt* — are the
        instruments of divine retribution against the Umayyads is forcefully
        made: "... God forbore with them [the Umayyads] for long, until they
        had afflicted Him; and when they afflicted Him, He took revenge on
        them at our hands. He restored to us our rights, and our Community
        became united through us. He vouchsafed our victory and established
        our authority in order to grant benefit through us to those deemed
        feeble on the earth (*alladhīna ustuḍ'ifū fi'l-arḍ*) closing an (epoch) with
        us as He had begun it with us." Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 30;
        translation as in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XXVII: *The 'Abbāsid
        Revolution* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), p.154

(with minor modifications).

55.   *Akhbār*, pp. 303f.; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, p. 1856; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, pp. 359f.

56.   See Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, passim; W. Montgomery Watt, "God's Caliph: Qur'ānic Interpretations and Umayyad Claims", in *Iran and Islam*, ed. C. E. Bosworth (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971).

57.   Cf. Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammadanische Studien*, tr. S. M. Stern and C. R. Barber (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967-71), I, pp. 112-18; on the *mawālī* see *EI*(2), s.v. "Mawlā" (P. Crone).

58.   Shaban, *'Abbāsid Revolution*, believes this class and this grievance to have been the fundamental force behind the 'Abbāsid movement.

59.   Cf. Crone, *Slaves on Horses*.

60.   Cf. Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, pp. 61ff., 83, etc.

61.   Cf. M. Q. Zaman, "The Relevance of Religion and the Response to it: A Study of Religious Perceptions in Early Islam", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1988), p. 284.

62.   The following paragraph is adapted from my article, "Routinization of Revolutionary Charisma: Notes on the 'Abbāsid Caliphs al-Manṣūr and al-Mahdī", *Islamic Studies*, XXIX, nr. 3 (1990), pp. 251-52.

63.   See, *inter alia*, the following: van Vloten, *Recherches sur la domination arabe*; Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom*, pp. 533f.; Bernard Lewis, "An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (1950), pp. 308-38; idem, "'Abbāsids" in *EI*(2); idem, "The Regnal Titles of the First Abbasid Caliphs" in *Dr. Zakir Husain Presentation Volume* (New Delhi: Dr. Zakir Husain Presentation Volume Committee, 1968), pp. 13-22; al-Dūrī, "al-Fikra al-Mahdiyya"; M. G. Morony, *Iraq after Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 497ff. *EI*(2), s.v. "al-Mahdī" (W. Madelung) and the references cited there.

64.   Cf. *EI*(2), s.v. "al-Mahdī".

65.   *EI*(2), s.v. "al-Mahdī".

66.   Cf. al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rīkh Baghdād* (Cairo, 1931), X, pp. 46ff.

67.   Cf. Lewis, "Regnal Titles", pp. 16f.

68.   See in this regard the pioneering work of Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory*, pp. 78ff.; idem, "The ʿAbbāsid *Dawla*", pp. 258ff. My discussion in what follows is much indebted to Lassner's work.

69.   *Akhbār*, pp. 213ff. See Lassner, *Islamic Revolution*, pp. 63ff. for a discussion of these passages and the significance of these and other parallels with early Islam. Also cf. Sharon, *Black Banners*, pp. 191f.

70.   Lassner, "The ʿAbbāsid *Dawla*", p. 263. Lassner's comment is very perceptive so far as historiographical insinuations of parallels between the rise of Islam and the ʿAbbāsid revolution are concerned. But in order also to see factual, historical parallels between nascent Islam and the ʿAbbāsid revolution (as Lassner often seems to do), one would have to take ʿAbbāsid historiography at face value — a problematic thing to do on Lassner's own showing.

71.   Cf. Lassner, "The ʿAbbāsid *Dawla*", pp. 258ff.

72.   Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, III, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dūrī (Beirut: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1978), p. 268.

73.   On the disagreement of the major sources as to the exact date, see Sharon, *Revolt*, pp. 154f.

74.   Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, p. 1987; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, V, pp. 379f.

75.   Sharon, *Revolt*, p. 155.

76.   The Qur'ānic description of the conflict of Moses and Pharaoh seems always to have been among the standard Islamic metaphors for the

perennial conflict between good and evil. The slogans and posters of the Iranian revolution of 1978-79 offer ample evidence of the undiminished vitality of this imagery. Cf., for instance, the poster reproduced in Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 182. Also cf. Goldberg, "Smashing Idols and the State", pp. 15ff.

77. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 41; translation as in *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. XXVII, tr. J. A. Williams (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), p. 164.

78. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 41; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, V, p. 420.

79. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 41.

80. See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, first edition (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1913-33; reprinted, 1987), s.v. "Ṭālūt" (B. Heller).

81. *Akhbār*, p. 246. Also cf. Sharon, *Revolt*, p. 84; Lassner, "The 'Abbāsid *Dawla*", p. 265.

82. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, first edn., s.v. "Ṭālūt".

83. Cf., for example, Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, VII, pp. 363f.; al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' al-Saḥīḥ*, ed. L. Krehl (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1862-1908), III, p. 55.

84. For a pioneering study see S. Pines, "A Note on an Early Meaning of the Term *Mutakallim*", *Israel Oriental Studies*, I (1971), pp. 224-40.

85. *Akhbār*, p. 285.

86. *Akhbār*, p. 285. On the meaning of the terms *ḍa'īf/mustaḍ'af* in ancient Arabian usage, see R. B. Serjeant, "The *Ḍa'īf* and the *Mustaḍ'af* and the status accorded them in the Qur'ān", *Hamdard Islamicus*, X, 3 (1987), pp. 3-13. Note that independent use of the term "*mustaḍ'afūn*" is not attested in accounts of the 'Abbāsid revolution. In the context given for the invocation of Q.28:5, it is likely to have had an essentially *political* signification: as referring, that is, to those who felt

deprived of their rights to the political headship of Islam. In the context of the Iranian revolution of our times, on the other hand, the term has featured prominently in revolutionary discourse, and has primarily been applied to the *economically* unprivileged.

87.   *Akhbār*, p. 287.

88.   Cf. Sharon, Black *Banners*, pp. 78f.; idem, "The Umayyads as *Ahl al-Bayt*", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, XIV (1991), pp. 115-52.

89.   Cf. Sharon, *Black Banners*, p. 147 and index s.v.; idem, *Revolt*, index, s.v. On some of the historiographical problems involved in this 'Abbāsid slogan, see Patricia Crone, "The Meaning of the 'Abbāsid Call to al-Riḍā", in *The Islamic World from Classical to Modern Times*, ed. C. E. Bosworth et al. (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1989), pp. 95-111.

90.   See al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 29-30.

91.   Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 29.

92.   Sharon, *Revolt*, pp. 123f., citing S. Lane-Poole, *Catalogue of Arabic Coins in the Khedivial Library, Cairo* (London, 1897), p. 26, nr. 246. Lane-Poole apparently thought this coin to have been issued by Abū Muslim, though Sharon seems to be right, on chronological grounds, to ascribe it rather to 'Abdallāh b. Mu'āwiya. On 'Abdallāh b. Mu'āwiya, cf. Sharon, ibid., pp. 138ff.

93.   Sharon, *Revolt*, p. 123.

94.   Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, III, pp. 141-43.

95.   Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 30.

96.   On the "testament" of Abū Hāshim, the most recent and the most detailed discussion is that of Sharon, *Black Banners*, pp. 121-40. Note, however, that Sharon does argue for the historicity of some such testament.

97. Insofar as the problem of narrative construction and the significance of narrativity are treated in this study, I have largely drawn on the writings of Hayden White, especially his essay, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality", *Critical Inquiry*, VII (1980), pp. 5-27. Also see Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973; [seventh printing, 1990]). For critiques of White's aforementioned essay, see Louis O. Mink, "Everyman His or Her Own Annalist", *Critical Inquiry*, VII (1980), pp. 777-83; Marilyn Robinson Waldman, "'The Otherwise Unnoteworthy Year 711': A Reply to Hayden White", ibid., VII (1980), pp. 784-92. Needless to say, my use of Hayden White's theories does not presuppose agreement with all his assertions any more than my understanding of his work necessitates his concurrence.

98. Cf. (Pseudo) al-Nāshi' al-Akbar, *Masā'il al-Imāma*, in Josef van Ess, *Frühe mu'tazilitsche Häresiographie: Zwei Werke des Naṣī al-Akbar (gest. 293H.)* (Beirut, 1971), pp. 31, 33, 36, 38, 39, 40, etc. Note that some of these "extremist" Shī'ite groups were also among the supporters of the 'Abbāsid movement.

99. The two basic studies of this tradition are, as already noted, Nagel, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehung des abbasidischen Kalifates*, pp. 55ff., and Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory*, pp. 65ff. My observations in this regard are indebted to their work.

100. See Sharon, *Black Banners*, pp. 173ff. and especially p. 178. But cf., in this regard, the strictures of Elton Daniel (in his review of Sharon's *Black Banners* and Lassner's *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory*) in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, XXI (1989), pp. 579f.

101. *Akhbār*, p. 205.

102. *Akhbār*, pp. 206f. Cf. al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, III, p. 81; but note that the latter knows nothing of any reference to the Qur'ān on this occasion. Also cf. Sharon, *Black Banners*, pp. 51f.

103. Cf. Sharon, *Revolt*, pp. 57ff., where he uses accounts of some such
      disputations to reconstruct "Abū Muslim's tribal policy". That the
      accounts of such disputations can be used for historical reconstructions
      of this sort is, in the opinion of the present writer, highly unlikely.

104. Cf. Daniel, "History of the Abbasid Family", p. 425: "There are
      portions of the *Akhbār*, as yet largely unstudied and unexploited, which
      were intended to explain and to justify the Abbasids' right to rule.
      While the historicity of such material is open to question, it is
      nonetheless extremely important in that it can serve as a guide to
      understanding with greater clarity the nature of political thought in the
      Abbasid period."

105. Cf. J. van Ess, "Early Development of *Kalām*", in Juynboll, ed.,
      Studies on the First Century of Islamic History, pp. 109-123; M. A.
      Cook, "The Origins of *Kalām*", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and
      African Studies* (1980), pp. 32-43. Also cf. Averil Cameron,
      "Disputations, Polemical Literature and the Formation of Opinion in the
      early Byzantine Period", in G. J. Reinink and H. L. J. Vanstiphout,
      eds., *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near
      East* (Leuven: Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1991), pp. 91-108. Note,
      however, that dialectics are not merely literary form; and disputations
      might take place between real theological opponents quite as often as
      between imagined ones.

106. *Akhbār*, pp. 42-117, passim.

107. Cf. *Akhbār*, pp. 25ff.

108. *Akhbār*, p. 46.

109. It is also possible to interpret Muʿāwiya's position — as represented in
      the initial part of this passage — as expressing reservations about the
      manner in which the *ahl al-Bayt* interpreted the Qurʾān, that is, in ways
      necessarily favourable to themselves. But already towards the end of
      this passage, it is made clear that Muʿāwiya's apprehensions really stem
      from what he himself recognizes to be the Qurʾān's position on the
      rights of the *ahl al-Bayt*.
      For a rather different instance of exception being taken to the way one

might interpret the Qur'ān, cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 105 (also cf. the variant in al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, III, p. 204), where Abū Muslim (after he has fallen out with al-Manṣūr) charges his predecessor, the first 'Abbāsid caliph, with several offences, among them "distorting the proper sense" of the Qur'ān (*istajhalanī bi'l-Qur'ān fa ḥarrafahū 'an mawāḍi'ihi*).

110.   On the vicissitudes of the transmission of historical traditions (the *akhbār*), the processes of their transmission, and the differences that the *akhbār* from the same putative source can exhibit in different compilations, see the important work of Stefan Leder, of which the following three articles may be mentioned here: "Authorship and Transmission in Unauthored Literature: The Akhbār Attributed to al-Haytham ibn 'Adī", *Oriens*, XXXI (1988), pp. 67-81; idem, "Features of the Novel in Early Historiography: The Downfall of Xālid al-Qasrī", *Oriens*, XXXII (1990), pp. 72-96; idem, "The Literary Use of the *Khabar*: A Basic Form of Historical Writing", in Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad, eds., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 1992), pp. 277-315. As will readily be observed, I am much indebted to Leder's work, especially in sections IV and V of this chapter.

111.   Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, p. 1937; translation as in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XXVII, p. 48.

112.   *Akhbār*, pp. 269f.

113.   Note that Q.6:45 ("Of the wrong-doers the last remnant was cut off, praise be to Allāh, the nourisher of the worlds") already occurs in another context in the *Akhbār*, p. 257. Here, Abū Muslim and the imām Ibrāhīm are depicted as present at the inaugural speech (?) of Yazīd III in the Great Mosque of Damascus. The imām assures Abū Muslim that "... this is the last of Umayyad rule, and what they had been promised has now arrived". He then proceeds to quote Q.6:45, and continues: "Get ready, O 'Abd al-Rahmān, hurry [the actual words used are: '*al-waḥy, al-waḥy*', which the editor explains as '*al-badār, al-badār*'], [there is] deliverance (*al-najāh*). The truth is with my supporters (*shī'atī*) and helpers in ... Khurāsān." (*Akhbār*, p. 257).

This passage is evidently related to, and prepares for, the subsequent account of Abū Muslim's being dispatched to Khurāsān and the imām's letter to that effect. Whether Q.6:45, which is used in both contexts, is invoked to link them together, and to help construct one or both narratives, are questions which must be left aside here.

114.   The speech of Abu'l-'Abbās is also reported in other sources: for example, anon., *al-'Uyūn wa'l-Ḥadā'iq*, ed. M. J. De Goeje, III (Leiden, 1869), pp. 199-200; Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd, *Sharh Nahj al-Balāgha*, ed. M. A. F. Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1959-62), VII, p. 154. Neither source was available to the present writer; for both references, see al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, III, p. 141 n. 3.

115.   Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 29.

116.   Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, III, p. 141. For other occasions where this *rāwī* makes his appearance, see ibid., index, s.v. Abū Mas'ūd al-Kūfī.

117.   Al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, p. 334.

118.   Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1960), II, pp. 297f.

119.   Cf. Daniel, "History of the Abbasid Family", p. 433 n. 40.

120.   Daniel, "History of the Abbasid Family", pp. 425f. and p. 433 nn. 40f.

121.   Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, pp. 1953-1959.

122.   *Akhbār*, pp. 301-304.

123.   The section of which the following outline seeks to summarize a part is entitled "The beginning of military hostilities between Abū Muslim and Naṣr b. Sayyār" (*Akhbār*, pp. 299-310). The early passages of this section — which will not be given in the following outline — are concerned, *inter alia*, with 'Alī al-Kirmānī's effort to sabotage a prospective alliance between Naṣr and Shaybān against Abū Muslim and a military engagement between some of Abū Muslim's troops and those of Nasr, etc. On this military engagement, compare the passage

in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, p. 1970, which is essentially similar to *Akhbār*, p.300 and also comes from Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb; this passage is, however, again part of *different* narratives in al-Ṭabarī (*Ta'rīkh*, II, pp. 1967ff.) and in the *Akhbār*, pp. 299ff., for all that Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb is the source of both. Daniel's view that "Ṭabarī's quotations from Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb are so different from the parallel texts in the *Akhbār* that they are scarcely recognizable as the same" (Daniel, "History of the Abbasid Family", p. 426) is in general correct, though this statement does not seem to take account of the similarities that some passages do exhibit.

124. See Sharon, *Revolt*, pp. 145ff.

125. Coherence is scarcely a very sound argument, after all, for the *truth* of a narrative. Cf. W. H. Walsh, *An Introduction to Philosophy of History* (London: Hutchinson, 1967), pp. 72-92, especially 76ff. Some of the pitfalls of supposing that it is may be observed in, for instance, Moshe Sharon's handling of the *Akhbār al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya* vis-à-vis most of the other historical sources on the 'Abbāsid revolution: see Sharon, *Black Banners*, passim; idem, *Revolt*, passim.

126. Cf. Leder, "Authorship and Transmission in Unauthored Literature"; idem, "Features of the Novel in Early Historiography".

127. Cf. Hayden White, "Value of Narrativity", p. 23.

128. The most ambitious work of this sort has been attempted by Sharon, *Black Banners*; idem, *Revolt*. On the former, see the reviews of Daniel in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, XXI (1989), pp. 578-83, and Patricia Crone in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (1987), pp. 134-36.

129. See, for instance, Nagel, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehung des abbasidischen Kalifates*; Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory*; Humphreys, *Islamic History*, pp. 104-27.

130. Lassner's hypothesis (*Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory*, pp. 11ff., especially p. 12) that the 'Abbāsid revolutionaries might have used a "loosely worded script" as the basis of their propaganda, which

later became the basis of an 'Abbāsid historiography, seems to put the cart before the horse. It would be more rewarding, I think, to look for narrative constructions of the history of the revolution, rather than for proto-narratives supposedly used by the revolutionary *du'āt* to win followers.

131.   Much of what follows on narratives is based on the work of Hayden White, especially his essay, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality".

132.   White, "Value of Narrativity", pp. 17f.

133.   Cf. White, "Value of Narrativity", p. 23.

134.   The most important work so far on the relation of scripture to early Islamic historiography is John Wansbrough's *The Sectarian Milieu*. Wansbrough is concerned there with much more than this aspect, though his focus is exclusively on the "*sīra-maghāzī* literature". But while scripture is quoted more frequently and more profusely in this literature than in any other area of Islamic historiography, the unique relationship of the subject of *sīra-maghāzī* (the Prophet Muḥammad) with scripture (as divine revelation to him) means that scriptural passages in this literature have a significance they cannot be deemed to have in other narrative contexts. Hence strategies devised to examine the relationship of scripture and historiography in this literature cannot automatically be applied in studying other kinds of historical narratives. Also cf. Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, pp. 203f., for a rather fleeting discussion of how a scriptural text might "constitute the framework for the events described" in a historical tradition.

135.   White, "Value of Narrativity", p. 17.

136.   Cf. Moshe Sharon, "The Development of the Debate around the Legitimacy of Authority in Early Islam", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*,   1984), pp. 121-41.

137.   Thus the view that "the *Akhbār* is a composite work", as Daniel emphasizes ("History of the Abbasid Family", p. 425), may be accepted in the sense that it draws — sometimes quite extensively — on

a number of sources, but evidently not in the sense of denying to this work a unity of its own.

138.   See Humphreys, "Qur'anic Myth and Narrative Structure", pp. 271-90.

139.   Ibid., p. 275.

140.   Ibid., p. 278.

141.   Ibid., p. 281.

142.   Cf. ibid., pp. 279ff.

143.   Ibid., p. 274; cf. Tarif Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography: The Histories of Mas'udi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), p. 114, approvingly quoted by Humphreys, *loc. cit.*

144.   Cf. Claude Gilliot, "Récit, mythe et histoire chez Tabari: Une vision mythique de l'histoire universelle", *MIDEO*, XXI (1993), pp. 277-89, especially pp. 278f. on "*preparatio prophetica*".

145.   Cf. Humphreys, "Qur'anic Myth and Narrative Structure", pp. 276f.

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Index

Words of very frequent occurrence, such as Qur'ān, 'Abbāsids, and imām have not been listed here. The Arabic letter *'ayn* and the definite article *al-* are ignored in alphabetization.

The 'Abbasid revolution is one of the major episodes of early Islamic history. It brought about not only the destruction of the Umayyad caliphate and its substitution by the caliphate of the 'Abbāsids—both of which were among the most powerful empires of their time—but also major transformations in the social, political, military, administrative, and cultural spheres of Muslim life. One of the best documented episodes of early Islamic history, the 'Abbāsid revolution, has also received considerable attention from modern scholars. This study takes a new look at the history and historiography of the 'Abbāsid revolution. The

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concern here is not with delineating the historical processes which culminated in this revolution, but with the revolution's religious discourse, as depicted in the narratives of the major historians of classical Islam. This study draws attention to the significance of the numerous references and allusions to the Qur'ān which occur in what the early Muslim historians report about the 'Abbāsid revolution, and describes a religious discourse in the making of which both the historical actors of the revolution and the classical historians of that revolution seem to share in varying proportions. As such, this work not only contributes to 'Abbāsid studies, but also raises questions of broadly comparative interest regarding early Islamic history and historiography as well as about the role and significance of scripture in social, political, and literary contexts.